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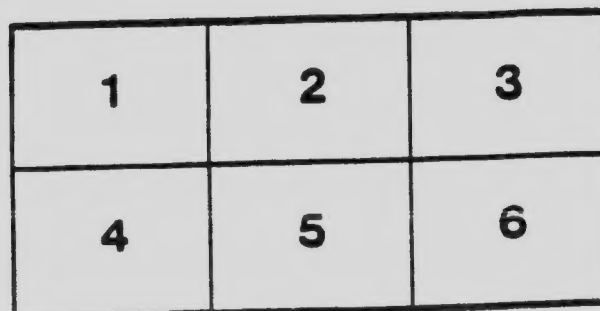
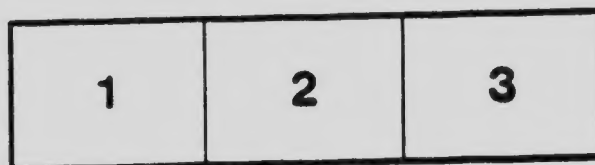
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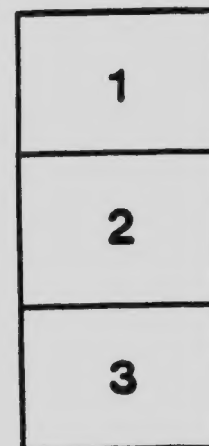
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FIRST AT THE POLE



BY
CAPT FRANK H. SHAW

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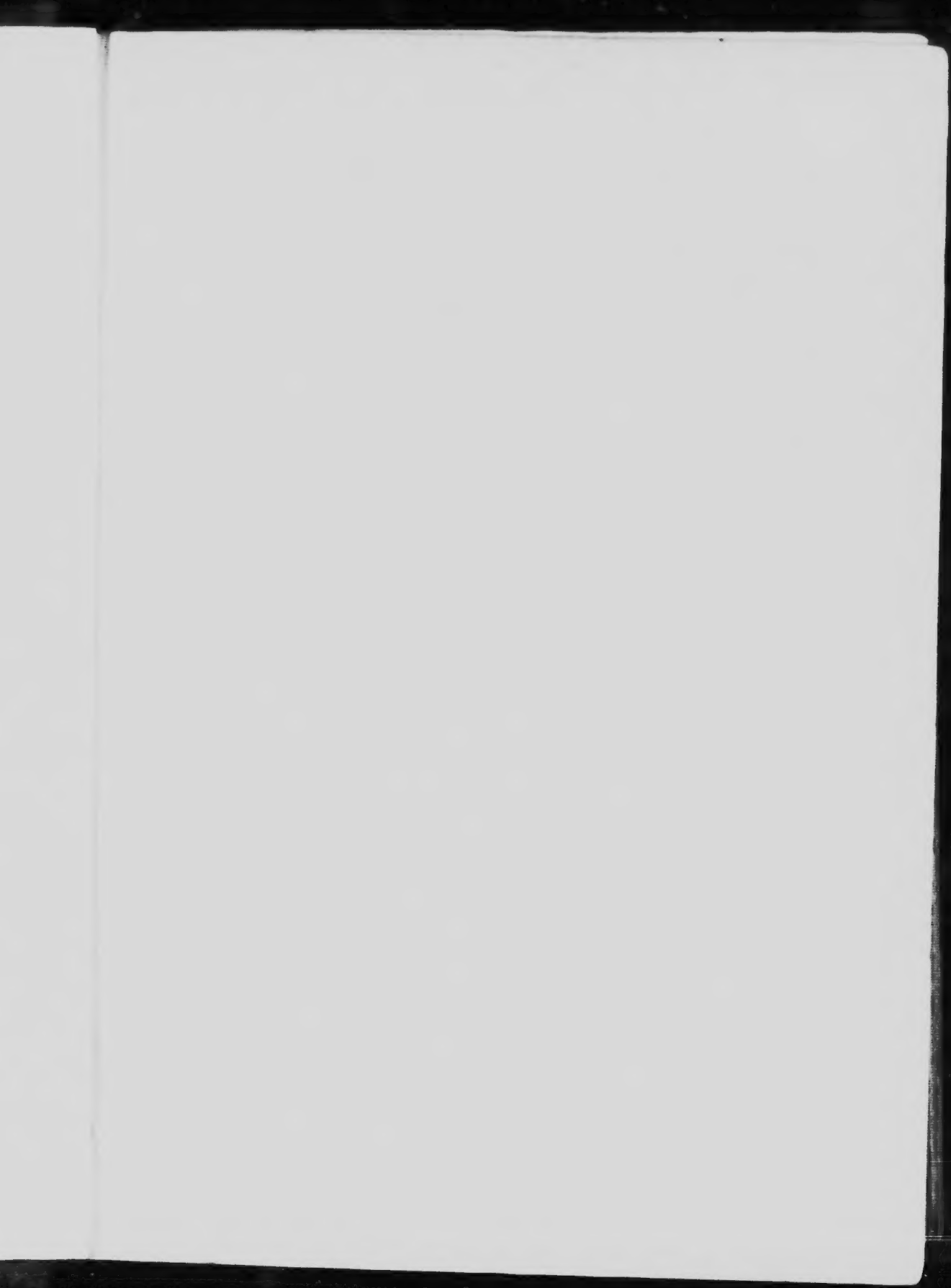
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Robert. C. G. Vian
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His Mch. Audley Reed
March 1909

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"Over the North Pole of the world Englishman and American shook hands heartily" (see page 295).

First at the Pole

A Romance of Arctic Adventure

By

Capt. Frank H. Shaw

With Four Illustrations by

E. S. HODGSON



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TO
MY MOTHER

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FIRST AT THE POLE

CHAPTER I

THE BIRTH OF THE GREAT IDEA

MR. LATIMER gave a little exclamation as he opened the morning paper and caught a glimpse of the headlines at the top of the first column of the middle page.

"Merriman, the millionaire, is dead," he said. "They publish some of the items of his will. This is interesting. He has left a quarter of a million pounds to the man who first discovers the North Pole." He laid the paper down and looked round the breakfast table, and his son, Harold Latimer, noticed that his eyes were shining, and that his strong brown hands trembled a good deal. Harold gave a shrill whistle.

"I say, pater, that would be worth trying for—eh? A quarter of a million—that would just about buy back Royal Latimer, and leave something over for expenses. A quarter of a million! I didn't know there was so much money in all the world."

Mr. Latimer sighed a little at mention of Royal Latimer; it had long been a sore point with him that he, the rightful heir to the fine estate, should have been ousted from his inherit-

ance. The Latimer pride was strong within him ; and there were times when, in spite of his kindness of soul, he felt bitterly towards the almost unknown uncle whose death had left him sole heir to the limited possessions bearing the name of Latimer. The magnificent estate which had belonged to his family since the time of King John had been wilfully gambled away by the dead man ; beyond the trifling house where Mr. Latimer now lived there remained nothing of the family fortunes. To cloak the sigh he picked up the pile of letters which a servant had just brought. One bore the stamp of legality—this he opened first, though with some hesitation.

“ I expect Menzies and Co. are troubling me about that mortgage,” he said. Then his face flushed a little ; he laid the letter down and seemed to have difficulty with his breathing. His son watched him with breathless wonder ; it was seldom his quiet, strong father displayed any emotion.

“ What is it, papa ? ” asked Mrs. Latimer, her sweet face full of anxiety. “ I do hope you’re not being bothered with bad news.”

“ No, no ; if anything, this letter contains good news. It is from Menzies and Co., as I said. But they tell me that Merriman—he was their client, too—left a verbal message with them that nothing would please him better than that I should be the man to claim that legacy. If I showed any disposition to undertake the quest, Menzies were to advance me as much

money as I should need to cover expenses, such money to be deducted from the legacy in case of success, and to be treated as a debt of honour in case of failure. It's a very tempting offer, my dear. I knew that Merriman was keenly interested in polar exploration; and I knew, too, that he was more than a little pleased with my reports from Franz Josef Land the year before last; but I never thought he would make such an offer as this. Of course, as Menzies say, this is strictly private; I must on no account tell the outside world how I manage to obtain my finances; but if I like to try, the money is there, and—really, it seems as if Merriman *wanted* me to win the legacy. It would be just like his generous nature—he knew our family pride too much to make a direct offer of the quarter-million, but he fancied that I might be emboldened to try my luck. It's very tempting—very tempting indeed." And his eyes took on a far-away expression, as if they were once more resting on the illimitable ice-fields of the Far North.

Few men were better known at that time as explorers than Henry Latimer. He it was who had penetrated far to the north of Franz Josef Land in the wake of Nansen; he it was who had boldly stated a theory that was directly opposed to that of Nansen himself. Mr. Latimer held that the great polar current did not drift from east to west across the Pole, but from south to north. To gain the Pole it was necessary for a ship to be frozen in somewhere about the

neighbourhood of McKinley Sea, and from there to allow the ship to drift slowly due north at the whim of the under-currents that surged and beat beneath the polar ice. Such was Mr. Latimer's theory, and as yet no man had proved it wrong. Indeed, it was simply lack of funds that had led the explorer to give up as hopeless the projected expedition to prove his theories. Had he been a rich man he would have started a year before, when his calculations were complete; but so far as he could see he might grow to be a very old man indeed before his hopes became realised. And now, here was an offer laid before him so tempting as to fire his blood with the flame of high adventure.

"Pater, you'll try?" cried Harold eagerly. "You'll try, won't you? It's too good a chance to miss. Think of the fame of it all—apart from the money. And then—think of Royal Latimer. It's worth risking a lot to have the old place for ourselves."

Mrs. Latimer's eyes filled with tears. She loved her husband, and she knew to the full the awful suspense of waiting and hoping against hope whilst a venturesome man fared forth into the unknown. But she was the wife of a hero, and not of the stamp to put any obstacles in the way. Mr. Latimer looked across the table at his wife; she smiled at him through her tears.

"I'll not deny it is very tempting," said the explorer. "So tempting that I hardly know how to resist it. But, there are certain draw-

backs. If we went—and failed, think of the consequences. We should be ruined. You, Harold, my boy, would never be able to enter the Army, not even an Indian regiment. You'd have to work with your hands to keep yourself. And your mother—— No; it seems too much of a risk. I think we had better thrust the temptation behind us once and for all. You see, we should be in honour bound to repay in some way or other the money advanced for the expedition. It would be difficult, and if we failed to pay it, well, it would be unfair to any man who did actually reach the Pole. You see, the money is to be advanced from the legacy — id—no, we mustn't think of it."

"But, pater, I'd be willing to do anything. I'd go and break stones at the roadside if necessary. Mother here wouldn't mind if she had to go without a new dress now and then; and we could be everlastingly happy in the tiniest cottage ever built, if we knew we'd tried. And we might succeed—we might succeed."

Mr. Latimer shook his head; but his face was very eager.

"No, my boy; I don't feel justified in risking it. Too much depends upon its success. You see, it isn't just myself I have to consider, there are others. I know your mother would be willing to stint herself in every direction, and you too; but I have to remember that I couldn't bear to see you living in poverty—no, no, it's hopeless."

Mrs. Latimer rose from behind the tea-kettle, and walked swiftly round the table. Her face was pale, for she knew that what she had to say meant long months, perhaps years, of painful separation, but she said what was in her mind, nevertheless, being a woman and brave.

"Harry, dear, I think you ought to take the risk," she said firmly. "It would be like flying in the face of Providence to neglect this opportunity. It seems to have been made for your special benefit; and—I sha'n't mind anything, so long as I know that my husband has dared everything for the sake of fame and fortune."

Mr. Latimer lifted his head, which had sunk despondently on his breast. "Do you really mean that, Marian?" he asked briskly, and Mrs. Latimer, on the verge of a breakdown, now that she had said her say, merely nodded.

"My dear, you deserve a better fate than to wait for my return," said her husband fondly. "You know what that waiting means—no news, only vague, alarming reports for month after month, until the months grow into years, and hope, at first bright and strong, slowly dies away into despair."

"Yes, I know," said Mrs. Latimer softly. "And knowing it all, I still say that your duty to yourself and your name is to go. Go, my dear Henry, and God be with you. As for me—don't trouble. Harold will help me to wait."

But Harold hung his head sheepishly. "You promised that if ever you went north again,

pater, you'd take me with you," he said heavily. "However, if the mater needs me, I suppose I'll just have to bite on the bullet and look the thing in the face."

But he could not keep the shake out of his voice, and he tore the bread on his plate to crumbs with nervous fingers. Ever since he could remember, through all the sixteen years that had passed since he was two years old, in fact, he had wanted to fare forth in search of that magnet which has drawn men surely through the centuries towards the mysterious *terra incognita* that lies beneath the Pole Star. And when, two years before, his father had promised that if he studied hard at school he would, supposing another expedition were ever projected, take the lad with him, Harold felt that life could never hold more joy. Now, it seemed that his dreams had been all in vain. He stared at the tablecloth, and despite his eighteen years, despite the fact that he was captain of the school, and leader in the football field, prime scorer at cricket, a sterling man at stroke in a boat, and able to swim two miles without a rest, slow, hot tears crept into his eyes.

His head was jerked back suddenly, Mrs. Latimer's hand was on his forehead.

"My boy, I'd forgotten. Of course, the pater will keep his promise. I'll be all right; don't fear for me. I'll go and live with Nora until you both come back. I wouldn't stand in my boy's way for all the world could give."

"I say, mother, that's awfully decent of you. But I'd better stay after all. I'm a man now, and you'll need a man to be with you when the pater's away."

The lad's better part was showing itself now ; and Mrs. Latimer felt a sudden tightening at her heart. She knew she had a noble husband ; she knew now that she had a noble son. So she kissed that son's cheek, and said :

"You'll go, dear. I want you to go. Because I'll feel safer if I know you two are together, looking after one another." And then, unable to keep her tears in check any longer, Mrs. Latimer hurried from the room.

Her husband shook himself together, and his face was alight.

"Your mother is the finest woman who ever lived, Harold, old chap," he said. "It is breaking her heart to let us go ; and yet—she'd rather it should break than that we should hold back. Well, she's setting us a good example in fortitude. If she can understand what she does understand, and still tell us to go we ought to prove to her that we're worthy of her sacrifice, and—and——"

"Yes, pater," cried Harold eagerly. "And—what?"

"And find the Pole, my lad. Let's talk the matter over carefully. Because I've made up my mind—I always was one to come to a quick conclusion. We're going to start out on this expedition, and we're going to find the Pole. You and I are going to be the first two

men to reach the goal, and once it's reached, hey for Royal Latimer and fortune! But you must understand this: I'm not starting off on this expedition simply with a desire to get the old home back. I'm going mainly because I want an Englishman to be first to reach the Pole. That's why—our countrymen have tried hard for the prize—and—we deserve to win. Now, we'll begin.

“First of all, comes the question of a ship. Now, I'll not deny that I've had my dreams these past two years or so; and I've kept my eyes open to the full. I've studied ships and men in a quiet sort of a way, and I've come to the conclusion that we can't do better than take a tip from those Russian ice-breakers on Lake Baikal. You know what I mean? They're so shaped that they can lift themselves bodily on to the ice, and by their own weight crush a way through to the water. Well, granting that the ice on Lake Baikal is never more than a foot or two thick, and that the Polar ice is seldom less than five feet from top to bottom—and often more—I think that if we could get a ship so constructed that she would lift herself on top, she might easily break her way through, providing she's heavy enough. Of course, it's only a theory, but it's one worth testing. Morgan and Bryce have been building a ship on those lines purely as an experiment, and I think that they would be quite willing to charter her to me on reasonable terms, because after all, if we did

discover the Pole with that ship, it would be a mighty fine advertisement for them. We'll take a run over to Liverpool and see them first thing. Wait, though, we'll run out first to see old Captain Labby. He'll be skipper, of course; it wouldn't feel like an expedition without him. There'll be a lot to be done, and we ought really to get away before the ice closes in up north. If we can once get behind the icebergs and bigger floes before the winter sets in, well, we shall be able to work our way forward slowly all through the winter, and then, when the sun appears again—make our dash for the Pole, and it won't be my fault if we don't get there, either.

"Another thing. This is in strictest confidence, mind. I'm disposed to leave no stone unturned to win success. It may be possible to get to the Pole through the ice, it may be possible to get to the Pole over the ice, but what about trying under the ice? That is one plan that has never been attempted yet."

Harold's eyes shone, he jumped up excitedly.

"What! In a submarine, pater? I say, that's a splendid notion."

His father nodded.

"Yes; a submarine. But that's all we'll say about it at present. Not a word to a soul, Harold. If anyone guessed at our plan we'd have dozens trying it before we were ready. Everything connected with the work will have to be conducted under strictest secrecy.

"Have you finished breakfast? If you have

we'll take a run over to Berryting and see Captain Labby. Oh, in this excitement I've forgotten the letters. Here's one for you—it's got the American stamp, and seems to be from Monro. I'll leave you to read it."

Before Harold had broken the flap of the letter from his cousin in Boston, however, there came the soft teuf-teuf of a motor outside; the front door bell pealed, and a moment later a hearty voice rang through the house.

"Yes, I know it's an evil hour for a call, Mrs. Latimer," said the voice, "but I've such a joke to tell Latimer that I couldn't bear to wait a minute. Latimer, Latimer, where the mischief are you? Listen to this——"

The dining-room door burst open, and a man of about thirty-five rushed in. He was clean shaven, slightly stout, and had the merriest face ever seen on a man. His little eyes twinkled with good humour, and he shook the rain from his cap in a shower, all over the tablecloth.

"Latimer, what do you think that fat-headed prig of a London doctor says to me? That I'm on the point of a nervous breakdown! Me! Think of it! I who haven't ever known a day's illness in my life! What does it matter to him if I was about every night for three weeks when we had the epidemic? He doesn't know. But he says that unless I take a year's holiday he won't be answerable for the consequences. And I suppose I'll have to do as I'm told."

Mr. Latimer put out his hand, and gripped

that of Doctor Vyner heartily. "I knew you were done out," he said. "I've watched you. You work far too hard amongst these poor people; you a doctor, too. Well, if you want a holiday I can offer you one. Come with us to find the North Pole, there's a good chap. There isn't a soul I'd rather have with me than you—except Harold himself. And we shall need a doctor in any case."

Vyner threw his cap in the air, and it fell with a splutter into the marmalade dish. Then he gripped Harold round the shoulders and lifted him bodily away from the table. He waltzed him round the room until he was breathless, slammed him into a corner, and almost sat on him.

"I'm the man who's on the point of a breakdown!" he laughed. "Count me in. Hurrah for the Pole! Can you spare me a moment to telegraph to town and get a *locum* to take over the practice? Then I'm ready. I've had breakfast, so there'll be no need to wait for that. When do you start? Now? I can buy a tooth-brush in the village, and that's all I need in the way of luggage. Oh, this is a happy day!" And he picked his cap up from the marmalade dish and deliberately licked the sticky mess from it.

"Not quite so soon," said Mr. Latimer with a broad smile. "We'll have certain preparations to make—get a ship, for the first thing. But it will be some time this summer, I hope, if you can wait until then."

"I can wait for years. I've wanted to see that North Pole ever since I could walk. I want to know whether it is a real pole, or whether it's only an imitation one. Cheer-o, Harold! We'll give the Polar bears a surprise." And he once more spun Harold round like a teetotum.

When he could get his breath again Harold went on reading his letter and his face lengthened a bit.

"Monro says he's coming over this summer, pater," he said glumly. "I've wanted him for ever so long; but why should he choose this year of all years?"

"Probably because he's ordained to go with us," said Dr. Vyner, devouring slabs of bread and butter with a zest that belied his recent avowal of having breakfasted. "We'll take him with us, too. England and America for ever, and God save the King!"

CHAPTER II

THE "ENTERPRISE"

THE two partners of the shipbuilding firm of Morgan and Bryce, of Birkenhead, smiled cordially when Mr. Latimer was announced. They liked the intrepid explorer uncommonly ; and before many moments were past they were to give proof of that regard.

"I've come to see if you'll let me take up a charter of that new experimental ship of yours, gentlemen," said Latimer, getting to his point at once. "This is my son, Harold ; he's interested in this business, so I brought him along. I want to take the vessel up north, and prove that she's all you say she is. In fact, I don't mind telling you that I'm going to have a shot for the Pole itself this time, and see if my theories are any good. So, to put the matter into a few words, what are your terms?"

The partners looked thoughtful, glanced at one another, and then Mr. Morgan took up the tale.

"Your mention of the new ship comes at a very queer moment, Mr. Latimer," he said. "In fact, almost immediately before you were announced we had received a telegram which we are now considering. It is from Sir Spencer

Fitzgerald, whom perhaps you know. He offers us our own terms for the *Enterprise*—as we have decided to name the vessel."

For once in a while Mr. Latimer's face grew dark. He was a cheerful man as a rule; kind-hearted and generous to a fault, but something had caused a change.

"Yes, I know Fitzgerald," he said curtly. "I know him too well, perhaps. However, that's neither here nor there. Sorry to have taken up your time, gentlemen. Of course, with an unlimited offer like that you wouldn't entertain any proposal of mine, which would be limited in every sense of the word. So Fitzgerald's trying the game, is he? I might have expected that. Nothing would please him better than to get in ahead of me, and take the reward. And I know what he'd do with it, too. However, good morning, gentlemen."

"Wait a minute, Mr. Latimer." The senior partner waved his hand cordially. "Take a seat. We said that we had received this message from Sir Spencer, but we did not say that we had accepted his offer. As a matter of fact, we have not. We thought that this business of Merriman's would arouse your enthusiasm, and so—well, we were simply waiting to hear from you before we moved farther. Now, we like you; you have done good work in the past; and we think that we may venture to prophesy that you will do better work in the future. Very well; we are not altogether bankrupt here; and

if you can see your way to make us a reasonable offer, we shall be glad to consider it."

Mr. Latimer recognised the generosity that prompted this speech, and his face was very jubilant. "That's extremely kind of you," he said. "But what I could offer would be very much less than Fitzgerald would. So——"

"Don't be hasty, Mr. Latimer. Now, suppose you say what you could afford to pay, and then——"

Mr. Latimer mentioned a comparatively small sum—mentioned it hesitatingly. But, to his surprise, the two partners nodded to one another, and presently Mr. Morgan spoke:

"Very well; we are disposed to let you have the ship on those terms. No thanks; we prefer that you should have her. We think that you would give us a better advertisement than Fitzgerald, and so—— But hadn't you better take a look at the vessel first of all? We can get our motor here in two seconds; and the ship is still on the stocks. Of course, we cannot have her ready for some months yet; but if you like to accept her—well, she will be ready for sea by the end of June, and I think you ought to be able to make a start then or soon after."

The arrival of the motor cut short Mr. Latimer's expressions of gratitude; and presently all four were careering along the road that led to the big shipbuilding yard on the shores of the Mersey. Amongst the many skeletons of ships that sloped down to the water's edge, a strange-seeming vessel

showed above the high palisading that protected the works from inquisitive eyes. When the car entered the yard it was seen that one of the slipways was totally cut off from the rest of the place by a very high hoarding.

"We have observed considerable secrecy in her building," said Mr. Morgan. "There are always spies about ready to steal other people's brains. But here she is—the *Enterprise*."

He unlocked a door that gave entry to the slipway, and the strange vessel was before them. She *was* very strange. As usual, she was built with her bow pointing inland, and this was the part of her that first met the gaze of the two Latimers. That bow was as unlike a ship's bow as could be dreamt of. Instead of being sharp and deep, it looked more like a great shoe. From a point about under the bridge, which was small and rather far forward, the keel stopped dead, and from that point gradually spread out broadly, until the bottom joined the stem, leaving a space of barely twelve feet between the hawsepipes and the rounded bow. The hull was not particularly sharp forward, but tapered considerably towards the stern, so that she would not be likely to be bound by the ice closing in about her afterpart. Passing astern, Harold saw that a stout steel curtain protected the screw, and this would prevent the need for lifting the propeller except in case of great emergency. The vessel was built of iron, and altogether looked as much unlike a ship as the

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mind could imagine. She looked more like a demented shipbuilder's nightmare, but as Mr. Morgan went from point to point explaining her, Harold saw that what she lost in shapelessness she made up in utility. She was made for crushing a way through the ice, neither more nor less.

"She will not be a particularly handy craft in open water, I confess," said the shipbuilder. "But we can do something with her. For instance, we shall fasten a stout bow on her, which will give her sailing qualities; and this will be made so that it can be totally detached when once you reach the ice. It will be in the nature of a caisson, and will float alone, so that you can rely on finding it again when you return to open water. The ship, as you see, is built of iron, but if you decide to have her, we shall sheathe her throughout with stout teak, and that will save her from severe nipping. She is constructed to steam strongly; but we are intending to rig her as a barque, so that an economy may be effected in the coal supply. At first we had intended to have her fitted for oil fuel, but if you take her up into that fearful Arctic cold the petroleum would probably freeze, and she would be helpless. Now, if there are any suggestions you can make, Mr. Latimer, we should be glad to give them our best attention."

Mr. Latimer climbed the gangway with Harold at his rear, and together the pair inspected the craft that was to carry them and their fortunes

to the ice-bound desert of the Farthest North. On deck the *Enterprise* was much like an ordinary ship, except that her bridge was very low, so that it would not in any way interfere with the working of the sails, whilst she had a big poop, like that of an ordinary sailing ship, aft. She was not by any means a big ship; perhaps of four hundred tons or a little less. Her masts were not yet in place; they would be stepped after the hull had taken the water, and would, so Mr. Morgan said, be of wood. "In case you should be compelled to burn them for fuel," as he explained.

Internally the *Enterprise* was roomy, capable of carrying a seemingly endless quantity of stores. Her iron skin was lined thoroughly with a tough structure of seasoned wood; whilst forward, where in an ordinary ship would have been the fore-peak and fore-hold, she was practically solid, so thickly were the timber bends placed in the run. At a casual glance she seemed capable of thrusting herself through anything that might come her way; and even Mr. Latimer, used as he was to the thickness of the Polar ice, expressed himself as satisfied.

"If we don't get to the Pole," he said, "it won't be the fault of the ship."

The fore-castle was below the main-deck, for the sake of warmth; the cabin accommodation was under the poop, and for a vessel of the *Enterprise's* class exceptionally roomy. There was a large saloon, where the afterguard of the expe-

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dition would take their meals and enjoy what recreation might offer in the Arctic seas ; there were three separate sleeping cabins, which were mentally apportioned by Mr. Latimer to Captain Labby, himself, and the doctor ; the mate and second mate would berth together in a larger room ; and there was also a room right aft over the propeller that Harold marked down for his own.

"It's got two bunks, pater," he said. "Monro 'll just have to go."

Mr. Latimer smiled at the lad's enthusiasm.

"But we'll have to wait for Monro's father's opinion first," he said. "I'll not deny the lad would come in handy. I remember he used to be a perfect marvel with dogs ; and then, too, his holidays up in the Canadian lumber woods will have inured him to hardship and cold. Well, we shall see. It's early days yet to make definite promises ; and the lad might not wish to come. You must remember, Harold, old chap, that it isn't every boy who would care to risk his life on a quest like this. You're the son of an explorer, and I expect you've imbibed some of my love of adventure ; but Monro, whilst being a fine lad, and brave at that, might have no desire to come."

"You trust Monro," said Harold loyally. "If I dare go anywhere he'll go too, or want to know the reason why."

They left the ship, and descended to the yard again, and standing beside the unsightly

hull, Mr. Morgan explained to Harold how the *Enterprise* would go about her business.

"The thrust of her propeller will send her forward," he said. "But the shape of her forefoot will naturally lift her above the ice, and instead of crushing into the pack, and jamming there, she will shatter the stuff by her own weight, and thrust it aside under the other ice. She will have to be trimmed differently from her sea trim when she is up amongst the floes; and I venture to say that you will stand a remarkably good chance of carrying out your project."

Mr. Latimer here approached. "I have given the affair consideration," he said. "If your offer still holds good, I'll charter the *Enterprise* at the price I mentioned."

The terms were accepted; and at once the explorer began to get busy. He was not by any means a visionary or a dreamer; once he had made up his mind, he left no stone unturned to carry out his plans.

"We must take all imaginable precautions," he said. "It will be necessary to send a steamer up as far north as she can go ahead of us, so that we can take fresh coal from her, and she must make back to the same spot next summer. But that is rather premature. I'll take the ship, and if you will push forward her completion to the best of your ability I'd be obliged. I don't know that I have many suggestions to offer; after all, the real dash for the Pole will be made

after the ship has gone as far as she can go ; all we want is for her to be able to withstand the rigours of an Arctic winter or two. I see you've made her barrel-shaped amidships ; that's a good thing, because if she does get nipped, the mere action of the ice bearing in on her will lift her clear, and she shouldn't be crushed. Well, we'll let it go at that. Now, gentlemen, I'm off. I intend to sail in July, and will let you know the date later. I'm eternally obliged to you for your generosity in giving me the first chance of the ship ; more obliged than I can well say, for this expedition means a lot to me."

Harold and his father then left the yard, and made their way back home. The venture was assured ; all that Harold had now to do was to wait, and the waiting was very tedious.

CHAPTER III

PREPARATIONS

THERE was so much to be done, however, that the tedium was generally bearable. For instance, there was a long, glowing letter to be written to Monro Gadgerley, out there in Boston, telling him of the expedition, and entreating him to get permission to go. Monro was the only son of a rich father who seldom denied his son anything; it seemed very likely that the American lad would form one of the party. There were interviews to be held with many people, for Mr. Latimer was not the man to start forth with a crew of untried fellows, who might mutiny or turn tail when the difficulties were most pronounced. Oldish, still active men were chosen; and perhaps only one out of a dozen seen would come up to the standard required. Every man was expected to be not only a perfect sailor, but something of an engineer, something of a carpenter, something of a cook, and also able to attend to animals. So there was plenty to do; flying visits were made to Peterhead, to select likely candidates from amongst the whaling veterans there—men who knew as much of the Arctic as any man can do; and there were long letters to be written to many firms, con-

cerning the all-important question of food. For if an army marches on its stomach so assuredly does a Polar expedition. Food is everything; there is no shop round the corner away up in Northern latitudes where the necessities of life can be procured. The ship herself is the storehouse; and when she is left behind—the little sledges are all that can be considered in the light of a provision store.

So the weeks flew rapidly away. A week after his letter was posted to Monro, Harold received an enthusiastic cablegram from Boston. It ran: "Say, you bet I'm on. Every time. Pater backs me up. Reckon I'll take the *Lusitania* this trip." And a week later Monro Gadgerley arrived at Larringford, the pretty home of the Latimers.

Since this story concerns the fortunes of Monro as much as those of his uncle and cousin, it might be as well to describe him here. He was the same age as Harold; square-shouldered, keen-faced, as strong as a mustang, wiry and tough. He had once walked fifty miles without a break in Canada—as he said, with a twinkle of his clear grey eyes. "It was that or go without." Fatigue was a thing unknown to him; he could shoot like Buffalo Bill, ride like an Indian, and there wasn't a dog in creation that he couldn't have head over ears in love with him inside two minutes by the clock.

"I'll make you chief kennelman," said Mr. Latimer on the day the lad arrived. "I don't

think I'd find a better one if I searched the whole world over. Of course, we'll pick up Eskimos along with the dogs when we get up to Greenland; and we'll get a Laplander or two also; for I'm going to employ both dogs and reindeer for the final dash if everything else fails. But you shall be skipper over the dogs, Monro; so you'll be a responsible man, for we shall probably depend a lot on the huskies."

"I'm there," said young Gadgerley proudly. "Write me down, Uncle Harry. You'll have dogs that you can trust. Say, Harold, this is going to be the time of our lives. We've just got to get through; there's to be no turning back this time. There's one of our men starting off again this year; he swears he'll make the Pole or bust. Baker isn't a chicken, and so it'll be something like a race as to who gets there first."

"There'll be more than two entries for the race, then," said Mr. Latimer. "I've just heard that Sir Spencer Fitzgerald is looking about him for a ship. He's already offered Captain Labby a bigger salary than I could afford if he'll join up with him; but Labby is true blue. He says he's made his bargain, and he'll stick to it, right or wrong."

The boys' eyes sparkled. This hint of rivalry roused their fighting blood; once Mr. Latimer had left them alone, they shook hands with a firm grip.

"We've just got to do it," said Harold.

FIRST AT THE POLE

"The pater's laying everything on this venture. Failure will mean—oh, I daren't think of failure."

"That's wise," said Monro. "The man who thinks of failure has gone half-way to meet it already. We're going to win out, boy; and we're going to stick the two flags up there together under the Polar Star. You have your dollars on Uncle Harry—he's not built on failing lines. Say, Harold, want to see the new rifle father gave me before I left? It's a beauty; a real daisy. Fires an expanding bullet, and is guaranteed to hit what it's aimed at anywhere up to fifteen hundred yards. Hard luck for the Polar bear that happens across its track. I'd just love to send a bearskin home to Maisie." Maisie was his sister, and his adoring slave.

"That's where the fun comes in," said Harold. "The pater's ready enough to talk about the hardships we'll have to endure; but there are any amount of bright spots. I'd like to have a pot at a bear, too. But wait till we start in buying the outfits, then you'll see some fun."

Sure enough, as time wore on, the fun began in earnest. There was so much to buy, and all had to be bought with a view to its utility. Clothing was a very necessary item; thick, rough under-clothing, capable of keeping men warm, no matter what the temperature. Furs would be procured farther north, of course. But there were many visits to stores; and Mrs. Latimer was busy from morning till night; and only Heaven knows how the seams she worked at were soaked time

after time with her tears. She had the hardest part of all to play, for she had to wait at home in idleness, unable to hear a single word of the fate of the two she loved best on earth.

It is to be feared that the two boys thought little enough of what home meant; but then—who could look forward to such an expedition as this with any regrets? The very name of the North Pole was a thing to conjure with; it was to those two lads what the mystic sound of El Dorado had been to the boys of Elizabeth's days. Wild adventure awaited them; death would face them a thousand times; they would grow to rely on each other for everything—oh, it was a glorious prospect.

The preparations went forward all the while. Captain Labby, an elderly man, who had spent the best years of his life amongst the Arctic whales, had long ago shifted his lodgings across the Mersey to Birkenhead, and he haunted the *Enterprise* like a shadow. The ship was launched; the two lads took a special trip over to see her, and were delighted with the progress that had been made. Her false bow had been fitted in place, and at a distance she looked but little different from an ordinary ship; though the wooden sheathing all about her, from above the water-line almost to her keel, made her uncommonly unsightly at a closer view. Her long taper masts were stepped, the lower yards were crossed; altogether Morgan and Bryce were acting up to their promises. And Captain Labby,

stroking his short grey beard, had no complaint to make. He was rather given to fault-finding as a rule, too, was this Arctic veteran, but then he knew how much depended on forethought and preparedness. If anything went wrong with the expedition it would not be for lack of any preparation he could make. There were times when the old skipper travelled across to Larrington to make suggestions, and to offer advice to the explorer, and at every visit he made, the two lads felt more and more confidence in the old man.

"I'm just a plain sailor, no more," he said. "I don't pretend to know about dogs or reindeer; and I couldn't drive a sledge to save my life; but I can plank the *Enterprise* down in the spot where she'll do most good, and I can keep the old shellbacks of the crew at work until they're ready to drop if needs be. And I'll wager even money that we'll make a race for the Pole that'll be talked of long after we're all dead and lying in our weighted hammocks a thousand fathoms deep."

Mr. Latimer ordered vast stores of pemmican from Lapland, where it is made in perfection. Dried reindeer meat, cut up fine, and then solidified with fat, that's pemmican; and it is about the most nutritious food that can be found; also, it packs close, which is a great consideration. Once they were up amongst the ice, decided the explorer they would do their best to kill seals, as in the intense cold of

the northern latitudes fat would be an absolute necessity.

So time passed on, until word was sent that the *Enterprise* was almost ready for sea. Her engines were installed; two hundred and fifty horse-power they were, and of an economical type, by which it is meant that great power was possible on a very small coal consumption. Once it was known that the ship was almost ready, the preparations were hurried forward at an amazing pace. Stores began to come down to the docks in vast truck-loads: casks of salt meat, cases of dried meat, more cases of tinned meat, sugar by the hundred bags, tea by the cartload; smoked fish—they would use these afterwards to feed the dogs; biscuit enough to stock a fleet; flour—it looked as if all Canada had been raided to find that mountain of flour that lay on the quays alongside the *Enterprise*. As for coffee and cocoa, lime-juice, and dried fruits—well, there was so much of everything that the boys began to be sickened by the sight of so much food. Towards the last came many big, heavy cases, at which Harold looked with understanding.

"We mustn't waste a single ounce of it, all the same," said Mr. Latimer, referring to the food. "Especially the lime-juice and the like. One thing we must guard against is scurvy—if that once gets hold of us we're done."

They had shifted their headquarters now. Larringford was closed; they took apartments

in Birkenhead, to be near their work ; and every day saw them aboard the ship. Harold and Monro made themselves into amateur super-cargoes, and helped to superintend the stowage of the stores, so that they would know exactly where everything was to be found ; whilst Captain Labby was here, there, and everywhere, displaying an agility surprising in a man of his age, attending to this one minute, flying aft the next to ask why so-and-so hadn't been sent down. Oh, I grant you there was something like confusion aboard the good ship *Enterprise* in those days, but it was orderly confusion, and all hands seemed to enter into the spirit of the thing with the keenest zest.

Dr. Vyner was a host in himself. "Pay !" he said to Mr. Latimer, when the explorer mentioned the question of reward for his services. "What do I want with pay ? I ought to pay you for giving me the chance of having the finest holiday in my life. And as for these drugs"—he waved his hand towards a vast tier of cases alongside the ship—"why, they'd have to be bought in any case ; if I didn't use 'em up north I'd use 'em at home. So there you are."

Usually Vyner was like a big boy ; always ready for a lark, fonder of flying off with the two lads for a spree than of confabulating with Captain Labby or Mr. Latimer. "Nature made a mistake with me," he said repeatedly. "I was never intended for a medico ; I'm like Peter

Pan, and I'll never grow up. But if I have to be a doctor, why, I'll be a boyish one."

The question of arms for the expedition required no little thought. There was no need to arm the ship with cannon—that was so much useless hamper, for what outside danger beyond the ice could they be expected to meet? But rifles, revolvers, and hunting knives were very necessary; and required careful selection. Rifles that would shoot strongly and straightly were absolutely a *sine qua non*; and another thing—it would be advisable to have them so covered with wood that, in the event of anyone touching a barrel with uncovered fingers, there would be no fear of the flesh sticking to the metal and causing serious trouble. Mr. Latimer had an interview with an eminent London gunsmith; and the result was that a dozen Express rifles were constructed to his order, with the barrels completely surrounded by the fore-ends, so that no metal was in sight, except the triggers, and they were intended to be covered with flannel when in use.

Apart from these rifles, twenty Winchester repeaters, of large bore, were ordered; and a dozen Webley revolvers, whilst all the after-guard of the ship were fitted with formidable bowie knives. The afterguard comprised by this time, Mr. Latimer, the two boys, Dr. Vyner, Captain Labby, the first mate, Mr. Syzer, a little man with a cherub face and the muscles of a Hercules; the engineer, Mr. Macpherson,

and the steward. Mr. Latimer intended to act as geographer to the expedition; Dr. Vyner would be geologist and naturalist, for he had a keen love for these pursuits; the boys would act as meteorologists—everyone, in short, had his own portion of work to do. As yet there was no second mate—there had been some difficulty in securing one. Until, less than a week before the ship was ready for sea, a man presented himself to Captain Labby and asked for the post. He had excellent testimonials: had been first-mate of a whaler for two years, and had been in the forecastle of the *Forward* in her historic expedition northward. But Labby seemed a little dubious. He told the man to wait outside, and when he had disappeared he turned to Mr. Latimer.

"He seems to be too good, that's the fault I have to find with him," he said. "He's not fit for a ship—he ought to be an angel. He don't drink, he don't smoke, he don't swear—he don't do this, and he don't do the other thing. Blessed if I know what he do do, sir."

Mr. Latimer laughed. "If he's qualified and sound, he ought to suit," he said. "Anyhow, he won't have very much responsibility, after all, and he certainly can't do us any harm if he doesn't turn out to be much of a sailor."

So Mr. Frederick Slazenby was duly installed as second mate of the *Enterprise*, and when he was informed that such was the case, anyone watching his face might have noticed that it

seemed to darken with something that was almost malice.

There were twelve men of a crew in the fore-castle, a large number as crews go these days. The sailors were also stokers; when the ship was under steam they would work in the stokehold; when under sail, on deck. They were hardy, willing fellows, of a type that is fast disappearing from the seas—men who were ready to work until they dropped—ready to grumble at anything and everything, but as loyal as men could be. The boatswain was a big Cockney, with an accent that could have been cut with a knife. The donkeyman, who was also second engineer, was, like his chief, a Scotsman. The carpenter was another Scot—and it was said of Chips that if you gave him a screw-wrench and a hammer he could make a clock out of a lifeboat. The steward, a bright-faced Liverpool lad, who could cook amazingly well, and who made it the work of his life to keep the coloured cook up to the mark, made up the complement of the *Enterprise*.

Then, on a day in early July, the River Mersey seemed to waken to a blaze of colour. The Albert Dock gates opened at an early hour in the morning, and the *Enterprise*, decked with bunting alow and aloft, came through into the open water—a thing of ugliness maybe, but a thing of gallantry too. Loaded deeply as she was, the majority of her defects were lost to sight, save that on her fore-deck she carried a mass of wood and

iron, that was, in fact, a very orderly array of planking and the like, to be used in the erection of winter quarters for the crew, supposing any unfortunate accident should happen to the ship. In her capacious store-rooms was food enough to last for three solid years ; and in the magazine, away forward, out of reach of the boilers, she carried a vast cargo of explosives, for Mr. Latimer knew that it was quite likely his venture might well depend on those. Dynamite might blow him a passage to the Pole if everything else failed ; and he was not the man to fail if anything of human forethought could help him to succeed. Too much depended on his success.

The anchored ships in the river gave greeting to their new fellow ; they sent rainbow-coloured strings of flags up aloft ; they blew their whistles until the noise was deafening—for it had gone abroad that this strange ship was about to depart on a voyage that should bring fame to England.

The Lord Mayor of Liverpool came aboard as the day went on, and inspected the ship, shook Mr. Latimer and the lads heartily by the hand, and wished them luck. And then, just as everything was ready—crowning glory!—a telegram was brought aboard from no less a person than the King himself. “God speed the *Enterprise!*” it read, and all who heard knew that the message was earnestly meant.

“Good-bye, mater ; I’ll take care of the pater.”

"Good-bye, my boy ; I know you will. Take care of him—of them both, Harry dear. And God speed you on your way."

Tear-filled eyes and choking throats, last embraces ; thick smoke overhanging the decks from the tugs alongside, for though the *Enterprise* would use her own steam whenever necessary, it was advisable to economise the coal ; a sustained yelling from the bull-throated sirens of the shipping, a dipping of flags—and then :

"Now, Marian, the boat is waiting." Mrs. Latimer walked blindly to the gangway, and her husband lifted her down very gently into the waiting boat. A last embrace, and the tugs strained at the hawsers ; a waving handkerchief that seemed to give the signal for thousands of other handkerchiefs to break out like blossom ; a final mad effort on the part of the sirens ; then—what was that ? Thunder ? No ; a mighty burst of cheering from the assembled legions on the landing stage. A brass band struck up "Rule Britannia" ; a score of fleet tugs shot ahead of the Polar Expedition ship, and took up a position as escort, their decks crowded with people, and then—one last, slow dip of the ensign fluttering there at the peak, and the low Mersey shores slipped past at an ever-increasing speed. The dash for the Pole had commenced, and the question that rose to thousands of lips was : "How will it end ?"

About the time the *Enterprise* was making

fast the tugs' hawsers, a telegraph clerk at Liverpool tapped off the following message :

*"To Sir Spencer Fitzgerald, Royal Hotel,
Aberdeen :—*

*"Enterprise on point of sailing. I am
aboard. Trust me.—SLAZENBY."*

And the man who received that telegram smiled craftily. "Slazenby will see to it that they don't get there," he muttered. "Now, I'll start, and then—look out, Mr. Henry Latimer."

CHAPTER IV

NORTHWARD HO!

"SHE's a better sea boat than I'd expected her to be," said Captain Labby, rubbing his hands gleefully, as the *Enterprise* put her nose under a crested North Atlantic sea, and lifted fifty tons of water over her forecastle. "In fact, considering everything, she's a mighty good sea boat, and with this sov'west gale she's making a cool ten knots, which isn't bad. We can't tell properly what she'll be like to handle under sail, because we haven't had a head wind yet; but running, she's decent—yes, decent."

The *Enterprise* was bucketing into a raging greyish-green mass, that, tipped with creamy white, seemed to roll endlessly. Look where eyes might there was no sign of land; hardly a sea-bird was to be seen. The ship had picked up a favouring breeze before she was well past the Mull of Galloway, and as she tripped forward before it, under sail alone, for the engines were as yet idle, the breeze freshened into a strong gale, which sent her speeding gaily towards the ice-fringe of the Arctic. She had dashed gallantly past the storm-torn Hebrides, she had called for fresh meat and vegetables at lonely Faroe, she had disturbed flocks of sea-birds

at the Lofodens; and now she was showing what she could do off the North Cape. Already the air was chill; and the spray fell on the faces of the boys like ice. But this was nothing to what they would have to face, and they joked cheerfully as the beads of water lashed them hungrily.

"This is something like business," said Monro, baring his head to the breeze. "We've had nothing but good so far, but—Harold?"

"Yes?"

"I've got it into my thick head that the second mate doesn't amount to a row of beans. You can generally get a good idea of an officer by watching what the men think of him. Now, I've got two eyes in my head, and I've seen the men snigger behind his back after he's given an order and turned away. Men don't snigger when the officer's worth while."

"Fancy, fancy, Monro! You've been reading shockers till your brain's chockful of notions that we're going to have a mutiny or something of the kind aboard. Those things don't happen nowadays."

"Don't blat. I'm no silly kid. I only expressed an opinion—hullo! What's that? There on the port bow—if that isn't—yes, it is." And he shouted out to Mr. Syzer: "Ice on the port bow, sir."

"Aye, aye," answered the mate, and got his glasses to bear. Harold held his breath; he had never seen an iceberg before in his life. It was drawing towards late afternoon, as time goes,

though the sun would not set all night. They had grown used to the phenomenon of seeing the ball of fire swoop down towards the north-western horizon as if determined to set then and there, and still continue its track unmoved, above the line where sea met sky. They were in the region of the midnight sun, and there was no night worthy the name; just a sort of mellow twilight at midnight, nothing more.

Harold jumped to the poop, and snatched at a telescope. He focussed it and then danced with delight. For there in the field of the glass was a vast thing that shone and glittered like a diamond of incalculable size. Now it was a delicate blue, shimmering like satin; now it was almost emerald green, against the greyish green of the sea it looked almost unearthly; again it was pure dazzling white, white like crystal; then, as the sun touched it, it was glowing crimson like a ruby. Innumerable spires shot into the frosty blue of the sky; jagged and unreal the thing looked, but there it was—Harold's first iceberg. Something rose into his throat at the sight; this was the advance guard of that vast ice-army which, ere long, they would be fighting. This was a messenger from the Arctic; a herald to welcome them. Or was it rather a messenger sent to hold them back, to tell them what might be expected up there beneath the Pole?

Whatever it was it lay there in the afternoon light, a monster. "Four miles from end to end," said the mate casually. "We'll see bigger than

that before we've done. Sort of lost its bearings, I should say. Don't often get ice hereabouts at this time—a current must have got astray. Well, that means anxious nights now."

Harold hung over the poop as the iceberg drew abeam. It was too far off to be distinguished clearly; but the air was so radiantly pure that the lad was able to get a very fair idea of the monster.

"You don't seem to care a hang for it, Monro," he complained, and his cousin snorted.

"Icebergs are cheap," he said. "We passed half a dozen in the *Lusitania*—and we'll pass millions more. Feel the cold now the thing's getting to windward?"

Suddenly a blast of air so cold as almost to freeze the blood in his veins, struck Harold. He was wearing ordinary clothing; he wilted and shivered into himself. It is something of an experience to pass under the lee of one's first iceberg.

The look-outs were doubled that evening; but no more ice was seen: the berg was simply an isolated specimen, washed to one side perhaps by the great Polar current.

So the *Enterprise* swept north and east, and then east again, heading for Kathrina Harbour, where the reindeer were to be embarked and the pemmican shipped. Spurned before the still-fresh gale she leaped forward gallantly, as though anxious to get to her appointed work. She was not built to play with these frothing trifles of

seas ; she was meant for sterner toil. Her work was to bore a stealthy, sure way through ages-old ice ; to head up towards the Pole.

She made her port in fine style ; and almost before her sails had been clewed up and her anchor had dropped crashingly from her bow, ugly lighters were alongside, pulled by squat, flat-faced Lapps, who might easily have been mistaken for Eskimos. These lighters were stacked high with cases and deer-hide sacks, all of which contained pemmican ; but in addition to these were several lighter-loads of dried moss and hay—food for the reindeer when they arrived. Presently another lighter put off, and ranged alongside ; and the deer were there, eight couple of them ; fine hardy-looking brutes, vast of horn and dewlap, strong of thigh—seemingly capable of going anywhere. With them were their attendants ; four little Lapps ; greasy of skin, odoriferous when standing to windward ; lank of hair, not pleasing outwardly, but sterling little fellows enough ; and they grinned good-humouredly at Harold and Monro, as the boys watched them come aboard. The sailors had already run a derrick overside, and, slung in broad skin belts, which were passed under their bellies, the reindeer in their turn came aboard, to be stabled at once in the space under the forecastle, where also the Lapps were to live.

The fodder was bundled aboard in hot haste, for now every soul was keen to be off, to try his strength against the strength of the Arctic.

The day after she arrived the *Enterprise* weighed anchor, dipped her flag to the land, and started across to Greenland.

Now the wind was almost in the ship's teeth, and it was necessary either to tack slowly across from land to land, or else call upon the supply of coal aboard. Anxious as he was to make a real beginning, Mr. Latimer ordered the engines to be started; and for the first time since she left home, the *Enterprise* thrilled through and through to the pulsing of her machinery. Somehow that steady beat of power spoke of high endeavour; a spirit of wonderful hopefulness permeated all on board. The ship bowed magnificently to the crash of the combers as they raced to meet her; trod them underfoot, as if practising for her real work in the ice, and flung the spray above her foretopsail yard. It was grand work, and for many a day Harold and Monro found no greater pleasure than merely to remain on deck and watch the orderly procession of the waves, though they broke the monotony occasionally by joining the Lapps with their charges, and inside two days Monro had each deer named and ready to come to him at a word. The lad's power over animals was simply marvellous; later it was to stand the expedition in good stead.

They were making now for Franz Josef Fiord on the Greenland coast. Here Mr. Latimer expected to pick up dogs and drivers, for nowhere can dogs of such excellence be found as in

Greenland. Taken south into temperate climates they droop and die out ; on the ice-fields of the north they flourish and grow strong.

They saw more ice every day now ; huge floes, lying like exaggerated pocket handkerchiefs on the surface of the sea, tiny remnants torn from the giant ice-fields away beyond their utmost range of vision. The look-outs were constantly doubled ; but once, when a big floe appeared right in the *Enterprise's* track, Mr. Latimer was strongly tempted to try her capacity for ice-breaking, until he remembered that he would in all probability shatter the wooden bow, and leave the ship unseaworthy for the remainder of her voyage. So the floe was skirted gingerly, and the voyage went on.

There was not much to be done as yet. Mr. Latimer was busily arranging his scientific instruments and taking hourly observations of the set of every current ; Dr. Vyner was making his room into the semblance of a miniature hospital. The carpenter was already employed in constructing sledges ; long narrow conveyances, with huge curving runners, capable of carrying a considerable weight. This was an operation that interested Monro immensely, for he had spent one winter up in the Hudson's Bay Territory, and knew more than a little about sledges and sledging. It was whilst he was watching Chips one day, when Harold was laughingly attempting to construct a suit of fur clothing for himself out of skins that had been bought in Lapland,

that the carpenter voiced a fear that Monro had already expressed.

"I'm a wee thocht dootful o' yon second mate," said Chips, passing a thong of rawhide through a hole he had bored in a runner. "Drat they wee pernicky threads of skin, anyways!" He hauled the "pernickety threads of skin" taut, and went on: "Good copper an' steel ought tae haud weel eneuch, ye'd fancy; but nae fear. It must be a' hide an' rope; nae metal o' ony kind."

"Metal snaps off like glass when the temperature gets under thirty below zero," said Monro. "Uncle Harry knows what he's about. Why don't you like the second mate, Chips?"

"He's a fishy eye, an' his hand—losh, mon, it's like a deid mackerel. I'm tellin' ye. Gin ye happen across a mon wi' they twa deefects, dinna trust him farther than ye can heave him wi' one hand. As weel, I met him the day afore yesterday as ever was, comin' up frae the engine-room, where he'd nae business. He looked kinder fleert tae see me, an' said, says he, 'I was doon ablaw asking the chief for a wee thocht o' oil, Chips,' said he. Weel, he'd no call tae tell me, had he? That's suspicious in itsel'."

"But he can't do any harm, even if he isn't quite the sort of man we'd like to have," put in Harold, and he jammed a needle into his own thumb by way of emphasis.

"Can he no'? Aye, ye've lived a matter o' eighteen year maybe, an' I've lived fifty. Weel,

I'm willin' tae learn; but I've ay found ane bad man can mak' a dizzen gude anes bad in half the time it tak's ane gude man tae mak' a dizzen scoondrels as saintly as himsel'. But then I'm but an auld fossil, with a heid fu' o' havers. Tak' nae notice o' ma whinings."

Monro looked at Harold, and Harold returned the glance. The same thought had come to the minds of both. If an experienced hand like Chips mistrusted the second mate, surely there must be something wrong with the man.

A little later Chips got up "tae hae a wee draw o' the auld pipe," as he said, and the lads were left alone.

"There's something in it," said Harold. "Look here, Monro. I vote we keep our eyes on that chap. As Chips says, he could work an infinite amount of trouble if he pleased. We won't tell a soul that we doubt him, but we'll watch."

But though they watched with all their eyes they saw nothing in the least suspicious. Apparently the second mate was a careful officer, even if he could not keep his men in hand. That might be due to his youth, for he was not much over twenty-four, and the hard-bitten old whaling men who formed the crew had no love for being ordered about by a mere boy.

Still, the lads' vigilance never relaxed, until the ship steamed into Franz Josef Fiord, and there anchored. The tramp steamer with coal was already awaiting them, and as soon as the anchor was down she came alongside. All hands at

once turned to at the coaling. No small matter, for once this tramp steamer was left behind there was little chance of obtaining fuel for many a long month. Therefore every crevice that would hold coal was crammed to the brim with it—and the entire foredeck was piled almost to the rails. Over the coal the planking for the huts was laid to form a flooring, and within a few days the *Enterprise* was simply bursting with fuel. The tramp steamer left as soon as her work was done, and took the last letters home—for beyond an occasional whaler it was doubtful whether they would meet another ship.

The dirty work of coaling was spared the lads in the main, for Mr. Latimer took them ashore with him to the little Eskimo township on the shores of the fiord. Here for the first time the boys saw the Greenlander in his own element, and found little enough to arouse their love. Squat, flat of face, ineffably greasy, these curious people waddled to and fro like walruses, patting everything the boys wore, exclaiming aloud in strange gutturals at the rifles they carried, following them like dogs wherever they went.

The boys went inland a little way, but found scant interest there. The summer was upon the land, and the upper ice had melted, so that the sparse vegetation was plainly visible—a coarse kind of edible moss for the most part.

Here dogs were procured, lanky, wiry brutes, almost as savage as wolves, ravenous eaters, surly enough—but Monro was here in his element.

There was something about the lad that drew all dumb beasts to him ; perhaps they knew in their own dumb fashion that he loved them well. Fifty of the whining, snarling brutes came aboard, prepared, if the evidence of their bared fangs and their upstanding hackles were any proof, to devour the entire ship's company without salt. Many of the sailors drew back instinctively, but Monro plunged in amongst the sea of dogs, careless of the menace of their fangs—crooning to them here, patting them lightly on the nose there ; tickling them, clapping them heartily, until the discordant mass was reduced to slaver-ing peace. One huge brute—the biggest and wildest of the entire company—placed its two big feet on the American lad's shoulders and licked him gravely, beginning at his chin and working thoughtfully to his forehead. Then he dropped on all-fours and lifted up his nose to send forth a howl of such mournful weirdness that even Harold, brave lad though he was, felt a shiver of apprehension strike through him.

"Steady on, old chap," he said to his chum. "They'll be eating you if you don't look out."

Monro laughed, and fondled the shaggy brute's ears. "Talk sense," he said. "They're only welcoming me. Think I don't know what huskies mean when they give tongue ? That's making me free of the brotherhood. I'll have them falling over themselves to get at me before long. I don't know why, but dogs always do. Perhaps they know I'm fond of them."

And what he said half in jest was speedily proved true. For he could not walk an inch but some great slobbering brute would leap clumsily to meet him, and, being chidden, would slink tamely to heel, following him about like a shadow. To the rest of the crew, save and excepting only the little Eskimos, their masters, the dogs were surly and vicious, often snapping at the men's outstretched hands; but Monro could do what he liked with them; and Lootchik-na, which, so his master said, was the name of the biggest, installed himself near Monro's room forthwith, and refused to be moved thence on any pretence.

"We won't put in more time than is necessary here," said Mr. Latimer, the day the dogs were embarked. "They tell me ashore that the ice is fairly open this year away up North. Every day counts now; if we delay too long the bergs will be coming back and closing up the open lanes in the ice."

The Eskimos who had been left behind in the coast town came on board as the *Enterprise* weighed her anchor, and set up a mournful howling chorus, in which the dogs joined woefully. It seemed to the superstitious sailors as if they were lamenting the death of their comrades thus early; in reality, the wailing coronach was simply a song of ordinary farewell. The natives were made happy with small presents of cutlery; to the chief of the colony, who had arranged for the purchase of the dogs, Mr. Latimer

presented a rifle—a Winchester—and some cartridges.

"You see," he explained, "they're half civilised, and they won't go shooting white men here, same as they did up north with that balloon expedition. And anyhow, they have a hard enough life; they need something to get them food."

"If they shoot as much as we did," said Harold, "they'll starve, pater. We only got a brace of ptarmigan and a fox—and that wasn't white. The place is quite a desert."

"Wait till you get into the ice, my boy; you might have more shooting than you can tackle," said his father. "Hullo! the anchor's off the ground, and we're off—Northward Ho!"

The *Enterprise* flung a white smother from under her forefoot, and trudged out to face the rigours of the Arctic ice.

CHAPTER V

A CLOSE CALL AND AN ACCIDENT

It had grown steadily colder since the day when the *Enterprise* left Kathrina Harbour, and at Franz Josef Fiord it had been frigid in the extreme. But two days after the exploration vessel turned her bow to the north for her great spurt, a blizzard of exceptional severity closed down upon the waste of ice-specked waters, and shut out the greenish line of the remoter horizon. It was the fiercest cold the two lads had ever experienced; even Monro, who had weathered a Hudson's Bay winter, confessed that the cold was intense. A strong westerly wind accompanied the driving snow; men walked warily, not daring to expose their bare skins to the elements for more than a moment at a time. Indeed, they had good cause to be careful; the third day out a sailor, who had been attending to the lead of a rope on deck, suddenly collapsed and rolled over. When they reached him his face was pitifully blue and his moustache was fringed with ice. He complained of a lack of sensation in his hands. Dr. Vyner took him into his charge forthwith, and as Harold assisted him, pointed out to the lad that the man's hand and arm were as white as marble.

"Frost-bite," said Dr. Vyner curtly. "Now we've got to work hard."

He sent Harold out on deck to gather snow by the bucketful. The sailor had lost consciousness, but presently he came to again, screaming with pain. Vyner plunged his hands afresh into the bucket of snow, took out a double handful, and rubbed stolidly at the arm, which was beginning to lose its whiteness now.

"Stop it, sir!" yelled the sailor. "You're torturing me to death."

"I'm torturing you back to life," said Vyner coolly. "You'll die if I stop. How'd you like to go through life with one arm—eh? Because if you yell again I'll nip the arm off at the shoulder, and give it to you as a curio. Lie still—sit on his head, Harold, if he kicks, because I'm going to get the circulation restored somehow."

It was a painful task indeed. Harold thought that he suffered as much as the man himself, but he bore up and watched the progress of the operation with keen interest. Vyner explained matters as he went along, and Harold stored knowledge away carefully, knowing that his own life and the lives of many others might in time depend upon his skill.

"The great thing is to keep heat away from the affected parts," remarked Vyner professionally. "Heat's to frost-bite what a red rag is to a bull—the very mischief. Keep on rubbing with snow, and give a little stimulant—that's the order of the day when frost-bite's about."

Well done, Harold; you'll make a sawbones yet."

In a little while the sailor confessed that the pain had lessened, and looked with thankfulness at his arm—now of a normal colour.

"I think we can put him near the stove now," said Vyner in conclusion. "He won't take harm so late along."

The cold increased every hour. The rigging of the *Enterprise* was coated with ice; great icicles hung from every projection. Her decks were covered with frozen snow; and not a stove-funnel in the ship but showed red-hot. They were feeling the first welcome of the real Arctic cold, than which there is no greater cold on earth. But the two lads, hardy as they were, grew accustomed to the rigours, as day succeeded chilly day. They spent a great portion of the time in the open air, refusing to sit in the well-warmed cabins; they ran races along what part of the deck was fairly clear of impediments; they scampered up aloft, careless of the ice that surrounded every shroud; they hauled valiantly on bar-tight ropes until they were in a glow of heat. Mr. Latimer regarded these antics with approval.

"There's enough heat in a man's body to enable him to stand the greatest cold, if it's given a chance," he said. "Far better to get hot this way than by crouching over a red-hot stove—like the second mate, for instance. That man seems afraid to open his mouth on deck; he's

not cut out for Polar exploration. Never mind ; he can keep a watch, and that's the main thing."

The boys, hearing this, remembered the words of the carpenter. What was it about the second officer that caused all who came in contact with him to distrust him? It was on their lips to repeat what Chips had said, but they refrained. After all, it was no concern of theirs to criticise a man much older than themselves.

"This sudden cold snap is making me uneasy," said Mr. Latimer that same day. "I'd counted on having a long summer, and on getting well up into the ice before the winter set in. There's sure to be a ring of high ice—berg-ice—round the floe-ice, and if we don't get through that ring before the winter shuts down, we might count ourselves done. Because the *Enterprise*, strong as she is, cannot trample down icebergs underfoot. Therefore, we've got to race like the very mischief to the limits of the ice, and get into the first channel that we can see—providing it's anywhere near the spot we're making for."

The explorer and Captain Labby spent long hours in the chart-room, delicately working out positions to the minutest fraction of a second. Long before, Mr. Latimer had explained all his theories to the captain, and had pointed to a certain spot on a chart of the Arctic, where, so he said, the *Enterprise* must enter the ice and commence her slow trudge Northward Ho! The vessel was making for this spot as unerringly as compass would take her, but the cold was

growing and still growing, and the shadow on Mr. Latimer's face grew longer and longer.

"We'd better get steam up and make a rush for it," he said finally. "The ship's sailing well, but she might do better with steam to help her."

"No, sir," said the captain with a shake of the head. "She'd hardly add half a knot to her speed, she's simply racing away from her propeller. And we've got to think of the coals—we sha'n't happen across a depot where we can rebunker once we've got past the outer fringe of bergs. My advice is : Keep going under sail for a while, and trust to the ship's heels."

North and still north lurched the *Enterprise* ; until it seemed as if she must sail clean to the Pole itself, and over the other side. And then, one day, when a crystal clearness held the sea-world in thrall, when the sea sparkled with a curious greenish glitter like a pallid emerald, Mr. Latimer and Captain Labby sat down to dinner, and spoke of the state of affairs. The first mate was on deck in charge, at the cabin table sat the two lads, the doctor, and the second mate—the latter apparently interested only in his food and in keeping himself warm.

"We ought to manage to get into the ice to-night," said Mr. Latimer. "I'll take a run up to the crow's-nest after this meal and get a look over the sea. If I sight any sort of a channel that promises to lead north, or even north-west, we'll put the ship in, and let the currents do

what they like with her. I'm only afraid we might be too late ; in that case we've got nothing to do save coast around the ice and look for another entrance ; though, as far as I'm aware, we're not likely to find one if there's none here. There's a touch of warmth in that current I discovered—the one that I think runs right over the Pole ; and that should keep the ice open longer than at other parts."

The second mate bent over his plate, and if anyone had been watching him it might have been noticed that he smiled in a cold, grim fashion. But all hands at the table were looking at Mr. Latimer, who was speaking with calm authority. The explorer went on to state his theory and little by little the listeners began to understand that underneath a quiet exterior Latimer possessed a remarkable fund of pluck and common sense.

"Come on deck, Captain Labby," he said, rising, and the two seniors of the expedition went from the saloon. Hardly had their backs turned than the second mate also rose, and instead of going straight on deck, to relieve the mate, he slipped away to his own room, and there fumbled eagerly in a locker. When he went out on deck ultimately, muffled to the eyes, one hand was held carelessly in his pocket.

The two lads emitted a shout of wondering awe as they in their turn mounted to the poop. As far as the eye could reach ahead stretched a vast ridge of shimmering whiteness, rising here

and there into stately pinnacles, in no place less than twenty solid feet above the water. This was the outermost fringe of the Polar ice; the fringe that is broken off in spring and floats southward in the shape of floes, to impede shipping in the North Atlantic. This barrier, so they had been told by Mr. Latimer, and as they knew from the conversations of old whaling men, extended northward for an indefinite distance; after which the ice thinned somewhat into a level plain. The beating of waves on the ice-fringe had caused the barrier to grow in height every day; but farther north, where the sprays from the waves were not able to reach, the ice would be only a few feet thick, and it was quite possible that for some considerable time the *Enterprise* might be able to crush her way forward.

The scene now before the eyes of the watchers was incredibly magnificent and indescribably forbidding. It seemed as if Nature had erected an impassable barrier in the face of those determined, ambitious adventurers, as if she had signalled her intention to keep them sternly from violating her sanctuaries. To all appearances the ship was racing under a full press of canvas towards an impregnable stronghold, where nothing but ruin could meet her. She might dash herself for ages against that wall of white, but she must inevitably retire, scarred and broken, with her object ungained. Even the two lads, hopeful as lads well could be, felt that the odds were

too strongly against them for success to be worth counting.

Between the ice-fringe and the *Enterprise* there still lay some five miles of sea, but at the speed the ship was going it seemed that any minute might plunge her upon the barrier. Mr. Latimer walked from the poop towards a small house on the main-deck, and there knocked at the door. The head of the chief engineer protruded cautiously, and the old Scot's face looked very grim.

"Just as a reserve we might have steam on the engines," said the explorer. "I've told the captain that I shall ask you to get steam up. You'll understand, chief, that we may not require it; but on the other hand we may. Of course, I understand all about saving the coal, but in an emergency such as this we might allow ourselves a little prodigality, eh?"

"Ay, ay, sir," said the chief. "I might say I forestalled ye, sir. I've kept a wee bit steam up, just sufficient to gi'e the shippie steerage way, ever since breakfast-time. I'm a man who considers it wise to be forearmed. I'm an engineer—I put nae faith in they rags up aloft there. Ye've only to ring the telegraph, and ye may be sure the steam will be ready for ye."

"Oh; then I'm just as glad," said the explorer. He liked the old Scotsman, and trusted to his judgment implicitly. "I thought that there was no steam up. I didn't see any smoke coming from the funnel."

"No, sir. The coals we got are good coals;

I've never sailed with better. No smoke worth conseederin' ; but the heat's there, an' I'll e'en slip ablau myself, and give the word to my second to rake up the fires a thochtie. My eyes arena' sailoring eyes, but I'm thinking we'll need steam in a few minutes or not at all."

Now the second mate had no suspicion of this conversation ; otherwise he might not have smiled so triumphantly as he did, when he descended from the crow's-nest, whither he had climbed, and reported that several tremendous icebergs were drawing across their course. The mind of Mr. Slazenby was a curious one ; a ready mind, swift to evolve plans. He understood that it might be a race for the opening that he had seen from the crow's-nest ; and he took precautions to make that race of but little avail. That is, he walked to the mainmast and ostentatiously busied himself with seeing the gear clear for running, exactly as a careful officer should, considering that sail might require to be shortened at any minute. And when he walked back to the poop, the same cunning smile that had appeared before was on his face.

"Come up to the crow's-nest, boys," said Mr. Latimer, as he left the chief engineer's door. "I want to show you what we have to face. In a very few minutes now we'll know our fate for this year."

They climbed aloft swiftly, hanging on like limpets, for the wind was hauling round towards the south a little, and increasing fast to a full

gale. They reached the great cask-like structure erected at the head of the mainmast, they forced their way through the trap in the bottom, and then they looked out upon such a scene as they had never witnessed before. Their eyes were turned northward, and the ice-ridge seemed to lie under their very feet. But what amazed them was the sight of a thin ribbon of green that ran in a dead straight line from the outer edge of the ice to a point that could not be seen. It looked like a ribbon at that height and distance ; in reality it was a channel, almost a quarter of a mile broad ; and that channel was the *Enterprise's* goal. But there was something else to be seen—something beyond the limitless stretches of ice that reached from the edge of the greenish water to the farthest horizon. Two gigantic bergs were swiftly rushing together across the entrance to the channel ; two mighty monsters, each of them five hundred feet high and of a length incredible. Borne by two divergent currents, as if that channel entrance were a meeting-place, the two monsters sped onwards from the south and west, and the south and east. And from due south raced the *Enterprise*.

And it was becoming a race in grim earnest. The ship was under a monstrous press of canvas ; the creaking of straining sheets and halliards was deafening up there above the highest spar. She burst forward nobly, as if proud of measuring her strength against the gale and her speed against those two giants.

"If they meet before we get there we're done for," said Mr. Latimer anxiously, watching the approaching bergs with strained interest. "They'll break up and fill the channel, and we're wasting our time in trying to gain an entry. But we'll have one shot at it, anyhow. It is going to be a race such as no man has ever seen before."

He clapped a megaphone to his mouth and roared out something to the captain on the poop. A muffled roar came up towards him. The boys held their breath; the very act of watching this mighty contest seemed to leave them weak and trembling. They were young, but they were quite alive to the gigantic risks the explorer was taking. If the worst happened there might be nothing left of the *Enterprise* in a few short minutes but some fragments of tortured steel. For it might well be that she would be caught between those two racing bergs and hopelessly crushed. At the speed at which the two ice-islands were travelling, nothing could save any object that once got between their wall-like sides; such object must inevitably perish in a fashion too ghastly to bear thought. Another alternative presented itself to the minds of the lads—it was as if only a miracle could keep the two bergs from meeting before the *Enterprise* gained the space between them. And that would be almost as fatal as a nip—it might mean that the expedition would be compelled to turn southward again for another year; and during that year what might not happen? Failure meant

total ruin to Mr. Latimer ; and yet, there he was, standing beside them, crowded closely in the crow's-nest, his face calm and set, but as cool as if he were merely taking the air up there in the lofty eyrie.

The *Enterprise* stormed forward, every spar quivering to the strain that was upon it. Would she win ? Would she win ? The question hung upon the lips of every man aboard, for they had all understood the danger. By this time they had clustered on the forecastle and high in the rigging, watching eagerly the breathless drama that was in progress under their very eyes. If any man felt fear he did not show it ; he only stared forward fascinatedly, his pipe stem clenched between his teeth, his eyes burning fiercely. They were old ice-fighters, these men, and the thought of such a battle as this appealed to their every sense.

Captain Labby had climbed up the mizen rigging, and hung there by one strong hand, peering under the other at the fast-approaching bergs.

"We'll do it," he muttered, "if only the sails will stand the strain." And he cast a quick, apprehensive look aloft at the swelling piles of canvas on the mainmast.

"Stand by to clew up for'ard !" he roared suddenly. If the bergs closed in before the ship reached the spot it would be necessary to drag the discomfited vessel forcibly from a position of imminent danger. On the other hand, it was

absolutely necessary to carry every stitch of sail to the last moment, or else the ship's pace must slacken and the race be lost.

"I can't stand this," said Harold Latimer; "I'm going on deck." But he could not drag himself away from the crow's-nest—the appalling grandeur of what awaited them there, now barely half a mile away, fascinated him like the stare of a snake.

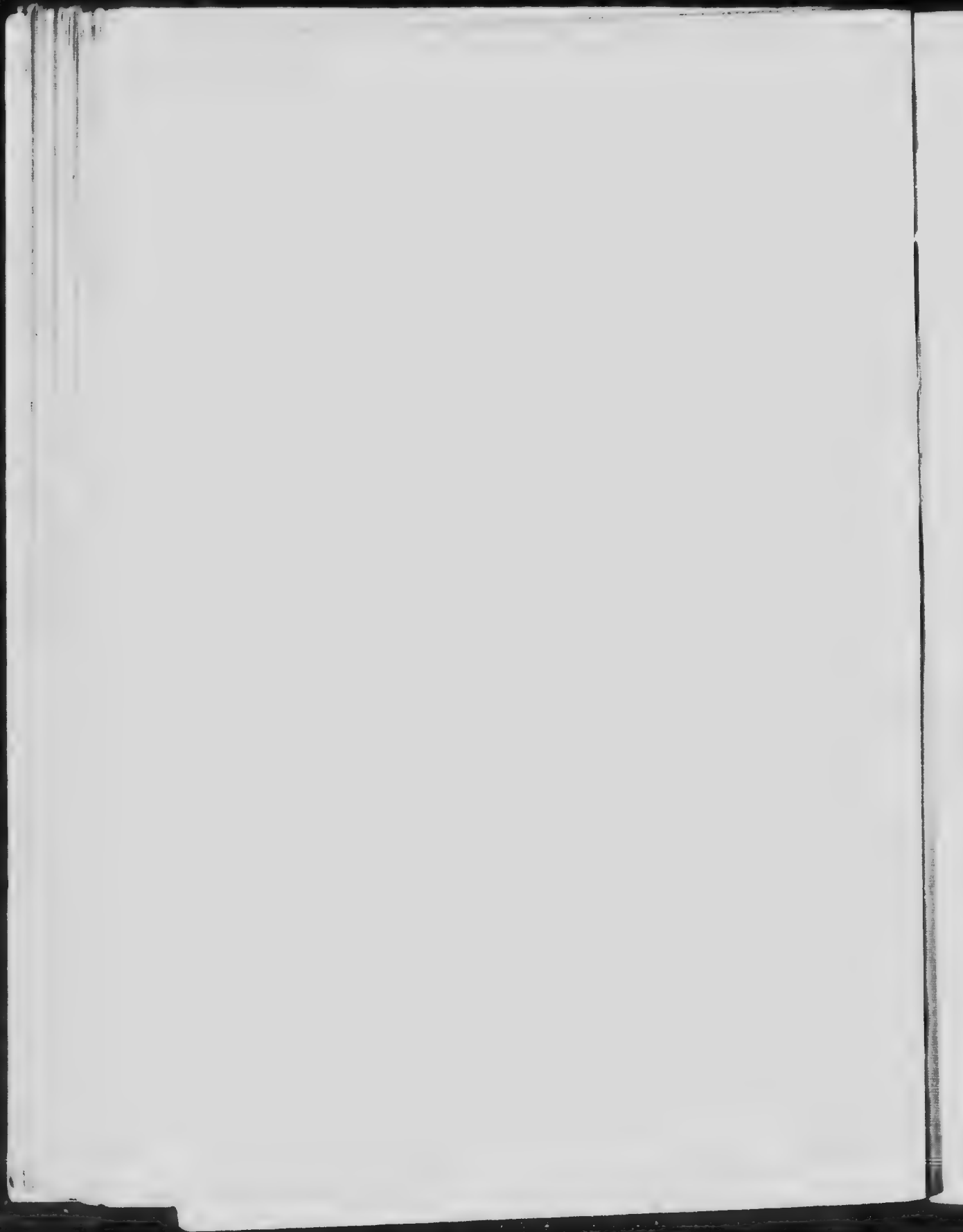
"Steady the helm!" yelled Mr. Latimer down to the deck, and Captain Labby repeated the thunderous command in a voice that made light of the clamorous wind. The racing ship steadied, her bow was now pointing dead between the two walls of ice that marked the entrance to the channel, dead between the two bergs too. Which would win?

The ship gathered herself together as if for a final plunge, she shook, she reeled, there was a crash that sounded as if the two bergs had met, and the main-topsail carried away, split to ribbons, and blew all-whither in confusion. The one thing that no one had counted on had happened—and one man aboard the ship smiled grimly into the recesses of his Arctic hood. Mr. Slazenby had done his work well.

There was a groan from a dozen throats as the great sail flapped itself into nothingness. The *Enterprise* paused in her headlong stride, she staggered a little, and then—she was between the two closing bergs, her speed diminished almost to a mere crawl, and sudden death hemming



There was a crash . . . as if the two bergs had met, and the main topsail carried away, split to ribbons" (see page 10).



her in on either side. It was a moment when men hardly dared to think—a moment when the world seemed to stand still in its course to watch the progress of events. The *Enterprise* was doomed—she could not escape. Without her main-topsail it was impossible for her to attain the speed necessary for the passage, impossible for her to retreat. She must infallibly be nipped to death between the two giant bergs—nothing could save her.

But she strove valiantly against impending defeat. She thrust the ice-thickened water away before her bows with all her proud impetuosity ; she leaned forward to the thrust of that favouring gale, and the bergs raced in to meet her.

From very far away there came the dim ringing of a bell, and the ship quivered hungrily. Had she already touched the projecting spurs of the bergs? Had the end come thus soon? No—no ! There was a loud cheer from the deck ; the throbbing increased madly, the ship reeled to the pressure. Then she added speed to speed, and leaped through the ever-narrowing opening like a startled hare. The chief engineer's forethought had saved her. At the critical moment Captain Labby had sprung from the rigging, yelled to the mate on the bridge, and Mr. Syzer had rung the engines to full speed ahead. Mr. Slazenby, gathering the reluctant crew together to clew down the slatting topsail-yard, gritted his teeth with fierce anger and cursed under his breath.

But that rush had not been accomplished a moment too soon. As the stern of the *Enterprise* cleared the mouth of the narrow channel the two bergs clashed together with a sound like the end of all creation, they crashed apart again and reeled drunkenly, then they closed together once more, and completely filled the channel. Between the *Enterprise* and the open sea lay an impassable barrier that would not be removed in all probability until the following summer. But the explorers had gained their objective: they were locked up in the Arctic fastnesses, and the way was open to the Pole.

CHAPTER VI

IN THE GRIP OF THE ARCTIC ICE

"We might as well come to a definite decision now," said Mr. Latimer calmly. It was what would have been called evening in a more temperate climate ; but up there in the Arctic Circle, where the sun remains above the horizon for weeks at a time, there was no night. Those who cared to avail themselves of the opportunity could have stayed on deck and seen the sun above the north-western horizon, its lower limb seeming to touch the ice, and though they watched until midnight they would not see the red, distorted disc set.

"We've gained our point to a certain extent," went on the explorer. "We've passed the main obstacle ; we're in the Polar ice. So far there is nothing to complain about. But we have something to do now that we are here. First of all, then, we shall take the ship forward as far as she will go. I want her as a depôt more than anything else ; and from her we shall be able to make our excursions. It is now well on in August—naturally, we can't hope to reach the Pole this year, because in another month we shall have no light worth speaking of. We may manage to get a considerable part

of the way to the Pole ; we may even, by a gigantic fluke, manage to get there ; but I'm doubtful of it. Whilst remaining doubtful, I'm not going to sit down and keep idle. We have a lot to do. In the first place, we shall get rid of the ship's false bow ; and I shall leave that to you, Captain Labby, and you, Mr. Macpherson. It is more in your line than mine. We'll give you as long as you require to get the structure removed and stored away where we can get it again. Once that is done we shall go forward along this channel until we come to its end, which cannot be far distant. If this wind holds fair we might manage to save coal still ; but once we get ice-locked we shall, of course, be compelled to rely on steam. Then we shall be able to prove whether this ship is really what her builders declare that she is. She may be—she may do better even than we or they hope ; but if she proves herself useless to engage with the thicker ice farther north, we have still one or two plans to try. And the first one will be an expedition by submarine."

He looked around the table with cheerful smiles. The faces of his hearers were a study. The captain looked frankly flabbergasted ; Mr. Macpherson nodded thoughtfully. "I thocht there was something akin to machinery in they long cases," he said. The two lads, who knew the inner secret of the expedition, laughed joyfully at the surprise Mr. Latimer's words had evoked.

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Vyner, the stout and good-natured medico, rubbed his hands together.

"Capital!" he said. "Capital! I should never have thought of that solution. They have attempted to reach the Pole in almost every way, on foot, in sledges, and by balloon; but never by a submarine. I foresee a wonderful success to this expedition, and—I am very glad I was such an enthusiastic motorist at home."

"Meaning——?" asked Mr. Latimer, and the surgeon laughed.

"Meaning that I shall have exquisite pleasure in driving your submarine for you," he said. "I understand that submarines are driven by petrol motors in the main."

"There will be big risks," said Mr. Latimer thoughtfully. "We take our lives in our hands when we embark on the submarine and go under the ice."

The doctor only laughed again, a laugh that Harold and Monro repeated gaily.

"The bigger the danger the better we'll like it," said Harold.

His father frowned. "I had intended doing this thing myself," he explained. "You boys—well, you're very young, you know; and it is really rather a risk."

But the cousins wouldn't listen to his protestations. "You promised we should go with you to find the Pole," they said firmly; and Mr. Latimer, remembering his promise, had no further arguments.

"There's lots of time yet," he said with a smile. There was something in these lads' calm disregard of danger that appealed to their guardian; he remembered his own youth, when peril had only been a spur to greater endeavour. Harold was his own son; Monro his own sister's son—he would not have had them otherwise.

"But these are early days to speak of submarine work," pursued the head of the expedition. "We have endless tasks to get through before then. We have to build the submarine, first of all; but I don't intend to do that until we have got as far north as we can go in the ship. Once we are securely hemmed in, we'll get to work and erect a shed that will hold the craft; build her, blow a hole through the ice, and launch her, and then—well, we'll see later. Mind, I'm only going to test a theory in this submarine venture. Lots of scientists have it that there is land in the immediate neighbourhood of the Pole. If we do manage to bore our way through the under-waters that surround the Pole, we might find ourselves checked by an impassable wall of rock. We might find that the surface is unattainable, frozen over by an impenetrable covering of ice. And then—well, there will be nothing to do save return the way we have come, with our hopes considerably lessened. But we can only prove what lies up there in the neighbourhood of the Pole by going to see for ourselves. And if we fail—though there is no need to mention failure before the attempt

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is made—we can always make a fresh start with the dogs.”

“Talking about dogs,” said Monroe, “I think I’ll go along and see how they’re getting along. It’s near about feeding time if I don’t make a mistake.”

Monroe went out of the cabin, donned his furs—they were very necessary by this—and went forward, where the kennels were constructed for the huskies. He had made a point of attending personally to the feeding of the dogs ever since they had come on board, and the dogs had grown to worship him, as such brutes will worship one who understands them. If Monroe had left the cabin by the companionway, which he did not, using instead the door in the poop bulkhead, he might have witnessed a suspicious circumstance. Mr. Slazenby, the second mate, was hovering very near to the skylight, every now and then placing his ear to a spot where the wooden lid did not fit as closely as it might have done. The second mate had not heard everything that had passed down in the cabin, but he had heard enough to understand that the indomitable explorers were likely to cause him endless trouble before he had completely frustrated their efforts.

“They were too cute for me to lose the channel for them,” said Slazenby, rising upright with a very nasty expression on his face. “I didn’t know they’d have steam up—or I’d have found something that would have stopped them, I know. Never mind, I’ve got lots of time yet ;

and then—well, I'll earn my money, or know the reason why." And he shook a covert fist towards the skylight.

Monro, meanwhile, went for'ard, and was greeted by a tumbling, vociferous tangle of animals, that panted and slobbered about him like an avalanche of dogdom. Eskimo dogs do not bark—they are too nearly allied to the wolf to do that ; but they indicated their pleasure in Monro's presence by a continuous whining. The Eskimo dog-keepers had grins of welcome for the big, strong lad, who had already contrived to pick up several words of their unlovely language. So too with the Lapps who had charge of the reindeer ; Monro had a smile and a word of greeting for them all ; but mainly he was interested in the animals, and they understood every sound of his voice.

Particularly was this the case with the biggest dog of all, Loot-chik-na. This animal was always first to raise its voice in a weird howl when Monro's step was heard ; it was always first of the great pack to rise on its hairy hind legs, and fling itself, a doggy torrent, against the lad's broad chest. Monro pulled Loot-chik-na's ears on this occasion for a long time, and the dog grunted pleasedly.

Then came feeding-time—and such a feeding-time ! The dogs were fed on dried fish and meat for the greater part, though Mr. Latimer had not omitted to bring several tons of dog-biscuits with him from England. Monro was

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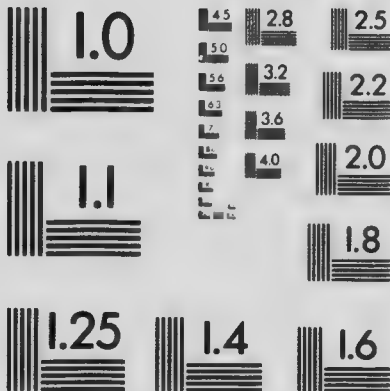
here, there, and everywhere; and such was his wonderful influence over the pack that they seemed to have taken on a tameness quite foreign to their nature. Loot-chik-na was already able to perform tricks; he had learnt them in a few lessons; and what his regular Eskimo masters had been unable to do Monro had done inside a few weeks. That is, he had made him obedient; so that he would come to the faintest whistle, or run away from the slightest uplift of a menacing finger.

And now the real adventures of the expedition began. The work at sea had been ordinary in the extreme; the kind of work every sailor might expect to meet any day of his life. Even the neck-and-neck race against the closing bergs had been a seafaring peril; but matters were altered now. There was very much to be done; and there was no time for idleness. But because Mr. Latimer was a humane man, and because he was able to influence Captain Labby also, the work was so divided as to allow every man a certain amount of relaxation and rest. Of course, considering that there was no night, there was a strong temptation to keep on until a late hour; but this was put a stop to by the order being issued that all work must cease at five o'clock, except the actual look-out, and that connected with the welfare of the ship. Once the false bow was detached it was probable that the *Enterprise* would steam both night and day, at least until she had left the open



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water of the channel; but meanwhile she was lying fast moored to the ice—for they had carried stream anchors on to the ice-fields as soon as they were safely out of reach of the smashing bergs at the channel entrance. With sails furled and mooring wires ashore, the *Enterprise* lay that night as safely as if in dry dock; and though beyond the barrier the storm raged and roared the ship herself never quivered.

Early next day all hands were astir. Work began systematically; every man who could be spared was slung overside on stages, to help in the task of getting rid of the false bow. It was far from an easy matter to rid the ship of this obstruction, but under skilful handling it was done effectually—by five o'clock that night the cumbrous construction was hauled away from the parent vessel; and the *Enterprise* was no longer a deep-sea going ship, but an ice-crusher confessed; capable, so it would seem, of treading her way to the very Pole.

Since it would be necessary to recover the false bow at some future date, in order that they might once more make a seaworthy vessel of the *Enterprise*, it was not abandoned to its fate amongst the ice, but towed astern. If it became necessary to cast the weighty thing loose at some later date, all well and good, they would do it, but not until the last moment.

"And now we're ready for off," said Mr. Latimer to the lads, who had played men's parts in the toil. "We'll start at once." And under

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a small press of sail the *Enterprise* went forward slowly up the narrow green lane that seemed to unroll itself ribbonwise before her.

It was comparatively early next morning that Harold awakened. There was a strange sound thrilling the ship. His first thought was that the icebergs had seized them; until he remembered the icebergs were by this time far enough behind. But what was the meaning of this strange quivering? What was happening to the ship? He rubbed the thick accumulation of frost from his porthole, and peered forth; drawing back sharply as his nose touched the glass, for a tiny morsel of skin had been taken off the tip of his proboscis by the short contact. In the Arctic the cold is so intense as to have the same effect as great heat. The skin was ripped off Harold's nose as if he had touched hot iron instead of cold glass; but he looked forth again, with more caution, and then drew in a deep breath. The ice seemed all about him; it was piled up wherever he could see. Close alongside the ship it was low-lying and fairly smooth, but further away it lay in rolling hummocks and high-flung masses, as if a troop of Arctic giants had been playing a game with the huge ice-boulders.

"We're frozen in, Monro," yelled Harold, diving for the deck, and slipping on his clothes, whilst his teeth chattered. "They've got the steam to work, and we're crushing through."

The American lad turned out in a most mighty

hurry. They lost but little time in dressing; but they did pause long enough to don their furs, and then they fled like madmen to the deck. The poop was deserted; looking aft, they saw that the masts were stripped of canvas, and out of the funnel poured a trickle of smoke. But, looking forward to the low bridge, they made out several fur-clad figures, and at once went towards the spot. Mr. Latimer and Captain Labby were there, looking ahead eagerly, and the grinding roar of shattered ice filled the air like the sound of thunder.

"She's doing well, boys," said Mr. Latimer, as the lads appeared. "She's doing even better than I expected. But she'll do better still when we get the trim of her altered." And he explained that the first thing to be done was to get the weightier part of the stores transferred forward from aft, so that the increased weight on the bow would cause the ship to crush her way through the ice with greater ease.

It was truly a marvellous sight upon which the eyes of the lads rested. Before the ship's shoe-like bow stretched a vast and dazzling waste which, under the glow of the sun, caused their eyes to smart intensely. In fact, so brilliant was the glare, that they could not bear to keep their eyes open for more than a moment or two at a time. Mr. Latimer, who had been fixedly staring forward, noticed this.

"Get snow-glasses, boys," he commanded, and they obeyed, went below and procured two

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pairs of green spectacles, which fitted closely to their eyes like motor goggles, and so prevented any of the glare from reaching their sensitive eyeballs. Thus protected, once they got accustomed to the livid greenness that tinged everything, they held their breaths and marvelled. The *Enterprise* was being thrust forward by the full power of her engines. She lifted her bow steadfastly right on to the surface of the floe ice, pressed forward until she seemed to be climbing up a steep hill that led to the skies; then, all suddenly, her weight told; the ice succumbed to the monstrous pressure, split and broke asunder, boiled up on either side, was thrust over the fields alongside in shattered masses, and the *Enterprise* went forward a little more. It was a truly magnificent example of the power of mind over matter; human ingenuity was setting the terrible obstructions of the Arctic at naught.

"We're going well," said Captain Labby thoughtfully. "If the ice will only have the decency to keep thin all the way to 90° N., we'll be at the Pole in no time."

"The worst of it is, the ice won't keep thin," said Mr. Latimer, with a shake of the head. "However, we'll do our best, and once we've done that we'll go on doing it. When we can't go through the ice we'll go under it, and if we can't go under it we'll go over it—but somehow I'n going to reach the North Pole." And his face was set and grim.

Breakfast was announced shortly afterwards,

and only the clamouring of remarkably healthy appetites dragged the boys away from the spectacle which so fascinated them. A cheery spirit of optimism seemed to permeate the ship; it spread from forecastle to cabin. There was no grumbling amongst the sailors; they were receiving good pay, and they were being fed better than ever they had been fed in their lives. Although the work was hard at the moment, there would come a time presently when they would welcome any form of work to give them relief from the terrible monotony of the Arctic winter. If there was a single face that showed anything but pleasant anticipation, it was that of the second mate; and from time to time he scowled heavily. He was vaguely troubled in his mind. He had gone the day before to replace the shattered topsail sheet that had almost caused the ship's loss, and had found a new sheet spliced in place, and the old one missing. And though he had questioned the boatswain carefully about the matter, that capable seaman had nothing to say, except that the mate had seen to the work himself. The two portions of the sheet were at that moment lying on Captain Labby's table, and the door of the room was locked.

"I'd be glad to see you in my room, sir, if you could spare a minute," said the captain, when breakfast was over. He wagged his head towards his own door, and, compelled by some expression of his face, Mr. Latimer followed

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him. The two lads, scenting some new adventure, followed, and were not ordered to retire; so that a moment or so later four people were gathered in the neat little room that Captain Labby called his own.

"It's about this, sir," said the skipper, indicating two coils of heavy rope on the table. "I had my suspicions about that topsail sheet carrying away in the fashion it did, though I was too busy to pay much attention to it at the moment. By and by, though, I remembered, and told the mate to see to it. And he found this." He held up the two ends of the rope, held them up carefully. "You see, sir, I saw to the fitting of that rigging myself, and I knew it oughtn't to carry away in such a capful of wind as that we had. So I examined this rope thoroughly, and you can see for yourself what I found. The rope's been cut; two strands cut clean through, and the third strand hacked a bit, so that any sort of a strain would break it. That's not been done by accident, Mr. Latimer; it's been done on purpose. And what I'm driving at is this: there's treachery aboard, and it behoves us all to keep a good look out about us."

CHAPTER VII

THE FIRST POLAR BEAR

"I DON'T see why we should always work," said Mr. Latimer, on a day not very long after the discovery that treachery was present aboard the *Enterprise*. "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. So far we have done nothing but labour, and now—well, I think that we're ready for a bit of exercise."

He was standing in the warm cabin, and his face, as he looked at the two lads, was very kindly. Harold and Monro were helping Dr. Vyner to stuff a bird that he had shot the day before. Up to now they had seen little of any game, but something in Mr. Latimer's smile attracted their immediate attention.

"I shouldn't be at all surprised if we happened across a Polar bear," said the explorer.

The two boys were on their feet in a trice and Dr. Vyner's bird was lying, an unconsidered heap of feathers and tow, under the table.

"Never mind the bird," said the surgeon, with a happy laugh. "Who would aim at birds when beasts are about? Who'd sacrifice a Polar bear for the sake of a ptarmigan? I'm your man, Latimer."

The boys paid no attention to this dialogue;

they were reaching down their rifles from the hooks in their berths, and cramming cartridges into their pockets.

"I shall take a Winchester," said Dr. Vyner; "then I shall be able to shoot half a dozen bears without reloading."

"If you follow my advice you'll take an Express," said Mr. Latimer. "Winchesters are useful weapons, but they have a fatal knack of jamming just when you most need them. I shall take an Express, and a single-barrelled one at that."

Monro came into the cabin, stroking the short, evil-looking barrel of his Stevens' rifle. It carried a bail of large calibre, and was supposed to be capable of bowling over the biggest animal that ever walked. The American lad's face was very eager as he slipped a murderous cartridge—containing a soft-nosed bullet—into the breech.

"I've dreamed about Polar bears ever since I was a kid," he explained. "Guess my dreams are coming true at last, uncle. I'd die happy if I could snaffle a bear on my own hook."

"And you'd die mighty unhappily if the bear snaffled you," said Dr. Vyner grimly. "Never mind; we'll teach the beggars a lesson. Perhaps we'll get a bear apiece—who knows?"

They donned their furs straightway, and drew on long fur boots that reached to the thigh; they covered their hands with stout mitts, and presently they were ready, four of them, for

the actual crew of the *Enterprise* had work to attend to. The ship was still forcing her way towards the north, as she had been doing now for many days; but her progress was extremely slow. Sometimes she advanced barely a dozen yards in an hour; the ice was growing thicker and rougher every day. But they had penetrated far, far north, and there was nothing to grumble at. Some time, when the sun set, they would stop that slow grinding advance and bank the fires, allowing whatever current might be present to bear the ship Pole-wards throughout the winter. Meanwhile, however, the *Enterprise* was crushing a way through the ice, and doing it slowly. So that it was without much difficulty that the four adventurers left the vessel. A ladder thrust over the side sufficed them; and in a very short time they were standing on the ice.

"We'll make for that big hummock there," said Mr. Latimer, pointing it out. "From there we'll get a good view of the surrounding ice; and somehow—I don't know why—I feel as if we might get a bear to-day."

They trudged forward, but before they had gone more than a hundred yards Monro stopped. "I might have remembered," he said. And he whistled shrilly, again and again, until something leaped from the rail of the almost motionless ship, and began to hurry over the ice towards them.

"He's as good a dog as ever I wish to see," explained the lad, as Loot-chik-na scampered

up and gambolled gaily around him. "And if any animal can scent out a bear, this chap can—or so his master told me."

He spoke a single word to the dog, and that sagacious animal at once pricked up its ears alertly, put its nose to the ice, and went forward in the lead. Arrived at the summit of the hummock, which did not happen at once, for the going was extremely difficult, they halted. There was nothing to be seen, nothing but the everlasting ice and snow, save that, at one point far north, they could detect what might have been a shadow. It might have been any one of many things—a seal or a walrus watching at its blowhole for a fish to rise; but there was just a remote chance that it might be the object of which they were in search. Since they were out for sport it was worth their while to pursue the quest farther. They ate some sandwiches they had brought with them, and pressed on.

They had become accustomed to the Arctic cold by this time, and that cold was very much less than it would be in a little while. Of course, as cold goes, it was something to wonder at, being about twenty degrees below zero; but the lads were well muffled, they were hardy and strong, and the active exertion of struggling along over the snow in the wake of the two grown men soon made them ready to wish that they had left their furs behind aboard the *Enterprise*. They wore snow-glasses as a precaution against the snow-blink—that terrible affliction which has

caused the death of many intrepid explorers. Even with their eyes thus protected they found them smarting painfully before they had gone another mile. But they were not of the stamp to give up a quest because of a little personal discomfort ; they went forward doggedly ; Loot-chik-na always in the front.

By this time the ship was completely out of sight, except that a trifle of smoke hung in the sky from her funnel. They walked through an icy desert, that rolled on in a vast loneliness like a white sea. There were huge hollows exactly like the troughs of Atlantic combers ; there were high peaks, like wave crests, and the going gradually got harder and still more hard. But they kept at it. Now and then a bird would start up and fly away with a shrill complaining note ; once, skirting a bulky eminence, they surprised a huge seal watching beside a hole ; but at the sound of their footsteps the animal vanished with a single movement, and all they could see when they reached the hole was a mass of bubbles. Loneliness and desolation were everywhere ; it seemed as though life could not possibly exist in that region of bitter cold.

"Hist ! That dog has smelt something." It was Mr. Latimer who spoke in a whisper, as if afraid of disturbing the unspeakable silence of the place.

Loot-chik-na was growing uneasy ; he lifted his head once and whined, a low, long-drawn note that sounded almost like the wail of a

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soul in torment. He would have started forward at a swift run but that Monro called him back, and slipped a rude collar round his neck, to which he attached a stout leather leash.

"No need to have him scare the bear away before we get a chance," said the boy. Then they went forward again; with Loot-chik-na straining desperately at his bonds. They dipped down into an icy valley, and they clawed their way up a difficult slope. They had sharp spikes in their boots, otherwise they could never have negotiated the steep acclivities. And it was Monro who gained the summit first, for Loot-chik-na had hauled the lad bodily forward. Then and there the lad dropped flat, with a single soft hiss. Silently the others joined him, and stared towards the north. And there was revealed a monster Polar bear—a very giant of his species. He was crouching beside a small crevasse in the ice; it looked as if he were waiting for something to appear from the deeps of the sea. Perhaps he was—perhaps he had seen a seal disappear, or expected a fish to rise. Be that as it may, there he was, a tempting prey. But—he was still a long way off; and they had had sufficient experience already to know that long-range shooting in that atmosphere was about the riskiest thing they could attempt. The refraction was so great, what of the low altitude of the sun and the vastness of the ice-plains, that even the most skilful shot might well have missed that mark.

"We'll stalk him," said Mr. Latimer, unslinging his rifle, and giving a low, contented laugh. The two boys looked at him curiously. Previously they had known him as a quiet, somewhat reserved man, a man with a dreamy look in his eyes; but now—this was a different man altogether. He seemed as happy as a schoolboy off on holidays; and yet—he had just proposed that they should deliberately stalk a Polar bear, one of the most ferocious animals known to man. Mr. Latimer was far from being a coward; he was a born explorer, and he loved the risks of life.

"Yes, we'll just stalk him," said the explorer. "Stay a little, though. We must make sure he doesn't get away. Vyner, you're a man, and so am I. I think we'll work away round to right and left if you like, and prevent him from escaping; whilst the boys can make a compass from here and hold him for us. Yes; that's the best plan. Now, boys, no hurry. Don't fire a single shot until you're near enough to do away with all probability of missing. But if you do get near enough shoot, and shoot hard."

He looked inquiringly at Dr. Vyner. The surgeon had never shot anything bigger than a hare in his life, perhaps, but he was a generous-hearted man. Mr. Latimer had asked him a silent question: "Shall we let the lads have him?" and the surgeon had nodded quietly. It was something like great generosity that prompted the action, for it is an event in any

man's life to shoot a Polar bear. But because both these men understood what their own boyhood had been, they sacrificed their own pleasure for that of their young companions.

Mr. Latimer at once set off at full speed, steering a wide arc towards the right. Vyner described a similar arc towards the left, and the two lads remained where they were, almost afraid to move lest the slightest sound should be carried to those wide-open ears half a mile away. Loot-chik-na had made one effort to break his leash and start towards the bear; he had attempted to give tongue; but Monro, without the slightest suspicion of fear, had deliberately muzzled the great brute with a rawhide thong.

"We'd better start on now," said Harold nervously, fingering his rifle. He was in a positive whirl of excitement; he could hardly control the loud beatings of his heart. Monro, more experienced, for he had shot pretty big game in Canada, was calmer, though his eyes shone behind his darkened glasses, and what part of his face was visible was almost as white as the snow itself.

"Hold on a bit, Harold. No use to spoil a good thing by any hurry. Say; guess I'll just creep away to the left a piece, and then you can go straight forward."

Monro was generous too—he wanted his cousin to have the bear for his own, and without waiting for Harold's reply the lad slipped cautiously away. Dr. Vyner and Mr. Latimer had

disappeared in the inequalities of the ice. Harold waited a little longer, very breathlessly, then he raised his body inch by inch and crept forward. The bear had not moved; evidently it was asleep. Harold gazed around him. There was nothing to be seen save ice. Monro and the dog had disappeared unaccountably; had they been swallowed in a crevasse? Hardly likely; and anyhow—there was the bear. Harold wormed his way forward on hands and knees, careful that not the slightest click of metal should reveal his presence there. Inch by inch now—it was slow work, but amazingly exciting despite its slowness. Harold was a brave lad, but he felt now somehow as if everything inside him were suddenly melted into water. It was not fear that possessed him, it was simply excitement; and the nearer he got to the bear the more that excitement grew. He was possessed of a hundred doubts. Would he be able to hit the brute even if he fired? What if his rifle missed fire? He had heard of rifles doing that before. What if—pah! what was the good of doubting so much?

He went on, and as his way led him down another declivity he lost sight of the bear momentarily. But he steered an unerring course, having marked a peculiarly-shaped knob of ice on the ridge above him; and because his eyes were steadily fixed on this knob he did not notice that a shadow had stolen slowly after him from his right rear. Another bear, much

bigger than the one he was stalking, was stalking him !

On steadily now, with every nerve keyed up to the requisite pitch for action. On very stealthily, for a single sound might carry to an indefinite distance in that cold, crisp air. Foot by foot the lad wormed his way up the gentle slope ; he gained the top, and then lifted his head cautiously. Fraction by fraction went his eyes upward ; then his heart gave one great leap, stood still, and commenced to race madly. The bear was almost beneath him, within a hundred and fifty yards—a surprisingly beautiful shot, except that the great brute's head was turned slightly away from the young hunter. The old method of shooting bear was to send a bullet beneath the shoulder through to the heart ; but modern rifles have made that precaution unnecessary. Harold knew that the bullet in his rifle was capable of shearing a clean way right through the bear's brain, and because he knew that a single shot might mean everything, he waited with what patience he could command until it moved its head.

It still remained quiet ; the lad groped about with mittened fingers until he found a chunk of ice. Then he lifted himself up and hurled the missile with all his force in the direction of the sleeping bear, afterwards sinking down soundlessly. The clatter of the rattling ice awoke the bear ; it lifted its head and looked in the direction of the sound. That was what Harold

wanted. His hands had been trembling hitherto, now, as he thrust forward his rifle, they were perfectly steady. A long sight, with the muzzle of the rifle fixed unerringly on a darker patch between the two angry ones, a long breath and—the shot sounded very dimly in that vast waste, so dimly that Harold thought the weapon had missed fire. But no—he looked through the curling smoke—saw the bear stagger upright with a strange giddy lurch; then it toppled sideways and lay quite still. Harold let out a yell—he could not have helped it had his life been at stake—he jumped to his feet, and then—he felt that his death was very near. For he had turned instinctively to summon his chum, and found himself looking almost down the throat of a still bigger bear that was within a dozen paces of him! And his rifle was unloaded!

The lad's life was hanging by a single thread. If, by dint of sheer bravery, he could keep his nerve long enough to reload, he might manage to make a fight for it. Desperately, forgetting everything save the need for immediate action, although his heart seemed paralysed within his breast, Harold jerked at the lever of the rifle. It jammed—try as he would he could not open the breech. Ah! it was open—one hand shot into his pocket in search of a cartridge, but the clumsy mitts he wore hampered him fearfully. He could not get a single cartridge—and the bear was lumbering towards him at a rapid pace. It had risen on its hind legs, and now towered

over him to a stupendous height ; its foul breath fanned his cheek. Impossible to load—impossible to do anything save die as bravely as might be.

He turned instinctively, but flight was useless. He knew well enough that for every pace he ran the bear would shuffle three—before he had gone a yard his brain would be ripped open by a blow from those evil, armed claws that were already sweeping out to kill him. Mad with desperation, he threw the rifle over his shoulder and aimed a sweeping blow at the brute ; it was all he could do. But the weapon was snatched from him, and he heard the snap of the tortured barrel as the monster broke it easily—as easily as if it had been a cane.

Harold gave up in despair. He swung round to fly ; he tripped unsteadily, and fell full length on the ice. He heard the shuffling approach of the brute, felt that its giant paws were uplifted to strike, gave a cry—he could not keep it back—and waited—waited.

A dim pulsation of the air, a sound like a lump of mud splashing against a wall—then a low growl, and the hot, acrid smell of blood. Harold was lying almost fainting with the awful suspense ; but he would make one last effort for life. And even as he came to that resolution he was pressed down by a falling weight of smelly flesh—almost smothered in a wealth of hair.

He thought that this was the end—that in

another moment the bear would have seized him in a mighty hug and crushed his ribs together, and driven the pieces through his lungs. But nothing of the sort happened, save that the dead weight of the monster held him pressed down remorselessly. For as long as it might take to count a score, Harold lay there, then he gave a little jerk of his limbs, gave another, wriggled sideways, exerted all his strength, and managed to get clear of the down-bearing weight. And, expecting every second to see the bear turn and tear him to pieces, he looked at it. It was quite dead, and a thin trickle of blood ran down from a neat round hole in the middle of its forehead.

What had happened? Harold could not understand. Much bewildered, he looked at the bear at his feet, and from there to the bear at a distance. Neither moved; he had only fired one shot. Then something else rushed over the ice towards him—another bear, surely. No; it was a dog—Loot-chik-na—no other, open-mouthed and savage. It made a bee-line for the dead bear and commenced to worry at its extended paw; and Harold watched it, unable to think, unable to do anything.

A shrill whistle, a yell of delight, and Monro was speeding over the ice towards him. With his mittened hand in that of his cousin, Harold gave a shaky laugh.

"Even yet I can't understand it," he said. "I saw the bear and shot it, and then I turned

round and saw this brute stalking me—but what happened ? ”

“ Oh ! I saw this beggar,” said Monro coolly. “ It was a bit of a risky shot, because if I missed it meant hitting you ; but I thought a bullet in your brain would be better than a hug from his majesty, and chanced it. I was a bit funky though ; it was over three hundred yards, and—I’m a little out of practice, you know, at long shots.”

Harold wrung his cousin’s hand with fervour. “ You’ve saved my life,” he said. “ I’ll never forget it, Monro.”

The other lad seemed a trifle ashamed. “ Nothing to make a fuss about,” he said. “ You’d have done the same if you’d been in my place. Think I was going to lose my chum when there was a chance of keeping him ? Look here, we’d better start to get the beggars skinned before we have ’em all frozen stiff.” And he drew a formidable hunting knife from his belt.

In a little while the other two hunters arrived, attracted by the shots, and to them Harold explained matters, for Monro, with characteristic modesty, refused to say a word.

“ I’m heavily in your debt, my boy,” said Mr. Latimer fervently, as he wrung the lad’s hand. “ I’m more than a little fond of Harold, and I don’t think I dare have faced his mother without him.”

“ This skin’ll be as hard as a plank if we

don't hurry," said Monro. "Can't we cut this out, uncle?"

And thereafter all four applied themselves to the task of skinning the two bears. It had been a good day's sport; bigger than anyone had anticipated; but it might easily have been bigger, and but for Monro's plucky shot the bag would have been the fuller by one boy—mauled by a bear. But everything had turned out happily, and in no very long time the two beasts were stripped of their skins, those skins had been rolled up roughly, the four hunters put their shoulders to the task, and set off gaily for the ship, dragging their spoil after them.

"I wouldn't have missed to-day for anything," said Harold that night. "And I'm obliged to you, old chap, for the fact that I'm here to say it."

"Haven't you forgotten that yet?" asked Monro. "I thought you'd have let it slip away hours since."

CHAPTER VIII

SOME ARCTIC ADVENTURES

FOR the next few days nothing of interest happened. The *Enterprise* forced her way little by little towards the north; but progress was becoming slower every day. The ice was growing thick and uneven; in spite of the fact that they had carried a vast proportion of the heavier stores to the fore-castle to increase the weight at the bow, the ice-crusher had all its work cut out to break down the impeding barrier of crystal white.

Finally, something like three weeks after they had first entered in the ice, the *Enterprise* forced herself to the top of the pack, and stayed there immovable. She could not break through the skin that held her up as firmly as solid ground; and, seeing this, Captain Labby and Mr. Latimer came to a decision. What the ship could not do human hands might do; and so the cry was: "Out ice-saws, and cut a passage for the ship through the ice."

This was tedious work indeed, but the crew turned to with brave hearts. To be sure, one or two of them sulked occasionally, and the strange part about it was that the sulkers were in the second mate's watch. The mate's men

were cheerful and very willing; they never needed to be told a thing more than once; they seemed to take their cue from their officer, who was invariably bright and optimistic.

They got out stout spars and rigged them up in the fashion of tripods, and to each tripod they affixed a heavy saw, weighted at its lower end. Under the point where the saw hung they dug a hole through the ice with picks, and when the hole was made they started to work the saws by means of tackles rigged to their upper ends. Three men hauled their hardest on each saw, and the saws came up; then they slacked away, and the implements' own weight caused them to snap a clean way through the ice. The sheer-legs were carried forward at every stroke, and in this way, with a saw working on either side of the bow, it was possible to force a way through a good deal of ice in an hour. There was no need to break up the great slabs that were cut away, no need to pole them painfully under the parent ice. All that was necessary was to signal to Captain Labby aboard the ship when a sufficient length was cut, and the *Enterprise* was driven forward at full speed, crushing the loosened stuff ruthlessly underfoot, driving it away by her own weight, often enough snapping off more than that sawn out by the velocity of her advance.

Every hour of the day was not given to work, be it remembered. Mr. Latimer knew well how the long Arctic winter would try the temper

of his men to breaking point, so that they would make grievances out of every task they were asked to perform ; and therefore he caused a judicious admixture of play to be mingled with the work. Of course, they were somewhat limited in their choice of sports ; but it was always possible to turn the men loose with a football on the ice, when the ship was motionless, and many a hard-fought game was indulged in up there in the eighties of North latitude. It was no cotton-wool football ; it was real rough and tough scrambling, and the man who went down received many a shrewd knock for his pains. But it livened the men up ; it gave them something to think about besides their own work ; it cheered them, and the sharp exercise did them no harm

At times, too, they would come across traces of seals and walruses, and hunting parties were organised. It was necessary to get some fat meat into the store-rooms before the winter set in properly ; something that would serve to line the insides of the men's skins, and enable them to endure the bitter cold, which was increasing in severity every day now. It was past the end of August by this time, and in a few weeks more the sun would sink from their sight, not to reappear for six long months. For half a year they would be in a dim twilight only, when they were not steeped in absolute darkness. And so it was necessary to get seals ; and many were the adventures in pursuit of these

uncouth denizens of the deep. They enlisted Loot-chik-na into their service, for the dog was a born hunter; and many a time he led them unerringly to the seals' blow-holes. Once, indeed, he led them almost right upon a whole school of the beasts, and then ensued a slaughter that was almost gruesome. There was no shooting—it was unnecessary. And, too, a single shot would have frightened the seals; so the men crept slowly forward over the hummocks, each one armed with a short, heavy seal-club for the purpose of striking their prey on the nose and stunning it. It was in this adventure that Dr. Vyner excelled himself. As keen as mustard when anything in the way of sport was in sight, Vyner armed himself with a formidable club, and joined the party. He it was who slipped out from behind a lump of ice and gallantly faced a great bull seal, newly aroused from sleep, and aimed a terrific blow at its snout. But the blow fell short, the doctor overbalanced, and fell his length right in the track of the monster. It is possible he might have suffered serious injury; perhaps even his life might have been lost, for a mad bull seal is not the pleasantest object to meet, had not the chief mate darted in between man and beast, and settled the matter once and for all by a stunning blow on the seal's bladder-nose.

A seal-hunt is not a lovely thing; there is something almost pathetic in the sight of the usually mild-tempered brutes being aroused to

mad anger by a desire to preserve their own lives and those of their offspring; but it was an absolute necessity that food abounding in fat should at once be provided for the crew. Harold and Monro both took their part in this hunt, and killed several seals each; but after a while the work sickened them—it had not enough of true sport in it to appeal to the fancies of two healthy lads—and they busied themselves in skinning the bodies where they lay on the ice, whilst the slaughter continued about them. Since the one aim of the *Enterprise's* men was to obtain fat and flesh, the hunt went on to its utmost limits, and when the seals were in full retreat—such of them, that is, as had escaped the heavy clubs—the men began to use their rifles to good effect. The line of flight from the spot where the school had lain to the air-holes in the ice became dotted with stiffening bodies, as the thunderous crash of the Winchesters rolled and reverberated amongst the hummocks.

The entire crew fed that night on seal-steaks, and far from unpleasant they were found; fried in their own blubber they were almost as rich as pork. To get their teeth into fresh food again was almost as good as a tonic to the men, for they were growing sick of the constant round of salt beef and pork, salt pork and beef, which made up their daily fare. To be sure the *Enterprise* carried a considerable store of tinned meats, but these would not be broached until the long Arctic night settled down on the ship, as constant

darkness might easily set the men a-brooding, and brooding of that kind meant scurvy without a doubt. Therefore they were fed on salt meat so long as the daylight lasted, and liberal doses of lime-juice were served out every day at eight bells in the forenoon watch, at which time the sun was due south, and at its highest point above the horizon.

On that lime-juice, to a great extent, depended the welfare of the expedition. Scurvy was the one foe they had to dread more than any, even the ice and the cold themselves. For ice can be fought by strong hulls and indomitable perseverance; cold can be guarded against by donning thick clothing and maintaining huge fires; but scurvy—that fearful disease that rots men’s bones even as they swear they are free from the terror; that saps away their courage, and makes the bravest only a muttering, fearful coward—scurvy cannot be fought on equal terms. So that everything possible was done to guard against its approach.

Dr. Vyner, thinking that a doctor’s work consisted as much in preventing disease as in curing it, spent every minute he could spare from his observations and daily tasks in hunting down anything alive that might serve as food for the expedition. So that often and very often one or other of the lads would find himself called upon to accompany Vyner on his slaughterous campaigns, and whole volumes might easily be written of their adventures on the Polar ice.

There was one time when Monro, after tracking down a wounded moose for two long hours, whilst Dr. Vyner was away in another direction after an imaginary bear, was turned upon by the desperate beast, and knocked down on to the flat of his back—his rifle flying from his hand to a distance where it was impossible to gain it in time to settle the matter once and for all. That was a time the American lad is never likely to forget. The huge brute shot fire from its bloodshot eyes; its nostrils vomited clouds of red-tinged steam—it did not attempt to gore him, for the very unwieldiness of its horns rendered that impossible; but instead, with the utmost deliberation, the moose began to stamp the lad's life from him. It knelt on him with crushing weight when he attempted to rise; it sprang upright and stamped with the force of a steam hammer. Though Monro, accustomed to deal with the deer tribe, twisted and turned valiantly in his efforts to escape the heaviest of the blows, it would have gone very hard with him indeed had the unexpected not happened. Just when he felt that matters were reaching a crisis—just as he dragged out his big hunting knife, and made a frenzied upward sweep with the keen blade, hoping to reach the moose's chest and so its heart—there came a swift scurry of feet on the frozen snow behind him, a yelling whine of madness; and something that seemed to the lad's half-stunned mind to be a hairy avalanche, launched itself full at the moose's throat and clung there like a

leech. It was Loot-chik-na, the dog, and though the great deer fought gloriously for its life, it could not shake off that deadly grip. To and fro swayed the combatants, the blood from the moose's throat dyeing the whiteness to ruddy grimness ; stamp-stamp-stamp thundered the labouring hoofs—all was to no purpose. Loot-chik-na clung on like a limpet, and gradually ate his way through hair and hide to quivering flesh, and there was hardly any need for Monroe's swift shot when at length he managed to regain his rifle.

This was only one incident out of many. One day Harold and Dr. Vyner started out in company, their hearts high, and their pockets heavy with cartridges. From the crow's-nest that morning the doctor had sighted a covey of birds—razor-bills, eider ducks, terns and a myriad other varieties of feathered game which had not yet made for the south. They carried with them this day shot-guns instead of rifles, and great was the execution amongst the feathered legions ; until, running ahead to take a snap-shot at a brace of duck, flying low and strongly, Harold tripped over a piece of broken ice, dashed forward on hands and knees, absolutely unable to stop, and so fell down a yawning crevasse in the ice at the bottom of which the water lashed and thundered as if with spite. It was a miracle the lad was not lost at once ; but as luck would have it he flung up one hand as he felt himself falling, and the gun fell across the crevasse,

bridging it completely. There he was left hanging, his feet and legs in water that was the coldest he had ever known, with only the rifle between himself and death.

That was another never-to-be-forgotten day. Dr. Vyner had not noticed the accident, he was away at a distance. All that Harold could do was to endeavour, unaided, to extricate himself from his perilous plight. But though he kicked desperately at the sloping sides of the crevasse, it was impossible to secure any sort of a foothold; the ice crumbled away. Worse than that, it was slowly crumbling away beneath the ends of the gun, and it seemed only a question of minutes before the weapon should break down the friable edges of the ice, and so precipitate its owner into the depths. Harold lifted up his voice and gave a yell that sounded to his ears to be nothing more than a whisper. Again and again he yelled his loudest, though his heart was freezing in his breast as sundry ominous cracks from the ice told how it was giving under the weight. Then he heard Dr. Vyner's voice in answer; he saw a shadow fall over him, and was dimly aware that the doctor was deliberately reaching out over the narrow crevasse at peril of his own life. Neither of the pair can tell to this day how they managed to regain firm footing; both have a dim consciousness of a frenzied slipping struggle, with the pallid green of the Arctic sea to strike terror to their hearts. Then Harold came back from a thunderous

confusion to find himself lying on the ice, his boots stripped off, and Dr. Vyner rubbing like a madman at his bare legs with huge handfuls of snow.

"Ah, you're coming round," said the surgeon, and for once he forgot to smile. "I thought you were done for, my lad. Your legs were turning white when I got your boots off. Now, up with you; into your boots like a shot, and if you stop running before you get to the ship I'll dock your food for a week."

It was a trying run; there were times when Harold felt that nothing could restrain him from flinging himself full length on the ice and giving up the race as a bad job. But always when he was nearest to losing hope, always when the shooting agony of the pains in his legs was most intense, Dr. Vyner was there beside him, cheering him at first, threatening him later, and towards the end, when the *Enterprise* hove in sight, and Harold sat down in despair, dragging the lad by sheer strength along the roughened ice; all in order that his legs might be spared. The drastic treatment had its effect. Harold did not suffer from frost-bite worth recording; in another week he was ready to repeat the experiment.

So what with one thing and another the early months of the *Enterprise's* imprisonment were far from being a deadly dull period. Even the men had nothing to grumble at; and let me tell you, British sailors are very great grumblers indeed. A spirit of magnificent hopefulness

pervaded the ship, with the sole exceptions of two of the men, and these dared not be openly discontented for fear of their shipmates.

All was not sport and play, however; there was very much work done in those weeks. Every day the *Enterprise* moved some little way northward, as the great ice saws carved a tortuous path for her bow. When at last the ice became too thick for the saws to prove of any use whatsoever, holes were drilled in the thickness with pick and spike; these holes were filled with small charges of dynamite, which were exploded, and then, before the ice had a chance to freeze up again, forward went the *Enterprise*, crushing the shattered ruins of the ice beneath her mighty foot. But there came a day when the strongest dynamite charge they could dare to employ proved useless; when nothing could move the ship from her icy prison.

On that day an observation showed them that they were in $81^{\circ} 15' 10''$ N. latitude, and $7^{\circ} 15'$ W. longitude. That is, they were only five hundred and twenty-five miles from the North Pole, as the crow flies. But so far as outward evidence went they might as well have been in the Antarctic Ocean itself; for those five hundred odd miles seemed absolutely impassable.

CHAPTER IX

MAKING READY FOR A SUBMARINE EXPEDITION

"AND now that we've come as far as we can, we'll try to go farther," said Mr. Latimer, and there was a ring in his voice that reminded the two lads of the ring of a well-tempered blade. "We've bored our way through the ice, and we'll trust to the submarine currents bearing us still farther north ; but in the meantime we'll do something else besides wait. We'll begin to get ready for our dash under the ice, boys ; and so—winter quarters is the word just now."

The strife and struggle that had been going on overside was stopped at last ; the cranes for the saws were all aboard ; the *Enterprise* lay securely in a great ice-dock. Every day now the cold was growing more intense ; twice the thermometer had registered twenty-seven below zero. For the past month or so, however, the air had kept marvellously clear of fog and snow, and there had been no wind worthy the name. The cold, therefore, was not so trying as might be supposed. A damp cold, with a wind blowing, seems to shrivel the stoutest man up like a snail on a hot shovel ; a great cold, such as this was, with the air perfectly still, was merely pleasant. Of course, it was dangerous

to let any part of the body remain uncovered for long, and it was very necessary to keep the skin dry to avoid frost-bite ; but it was quite possible for men and boys to walk uprightly, and take a pleasure in the walking. Later it would be much colder—very much colder ; and the winter would bring devastating gales that would cut through the heaviest clothing ; but sufficient unto the day was the evil thereof ; and no one complained.

“ Turn the hands to to rig up the workshop,” said Mr. Latimer to Captain Labby, and the word was passed along the decks. Every man who could be spared busied himself now. There was a lot to be done, he it said. As has been mentioned, the decks of the *Enterprise* had been filled high with coal, and on top of this coal had been placed the planking that had been brought from England for the purpose of erecting a vast shed. The first thing to be done was to drag all this planking away from the coal, shovel the fuel down into the bunkers that had been emptied during the steaming, and then, this work completed, to commence the erection of the shed itself.

“ I did think of building the shed on the ice,” said Mr. Latimer to the boys ; “ but on second thoughts I won’t. There’s no telling what might happen ; and a single gale might send the place flying about our ears. So we’ll simply roof in the ship’s upper deck, and I think that ought to give us as big a room as we need.”

As he ordered, so it was done. The entire foredeck of the ship, from the bridge to the break of the forecastle, was converted into a huge room, almost a hundred feet long and as broad as the ship itself. The sloping roof rose from the bulwarks to the 'midships, and at each end of the vast place was erected a mighty stove, which roared and crackled all day long. The carpenter oversaw this work of erection, and when it was completed he went on to the ice and surveyed his handiwork with pride.

"Yon's a bonny bit shieling," he observed to Harold. "We'll e'en get up a bit dance tae celebrate the event." And they did. The boatswain was something of a fiddler, the cook had a concertina—as most sea-cooks have—whilst the chief engineer played the flute enough to make tears come into the merriest eyes, and they were not tears of agony either, but tears of downright enjoyment. With such a band as that it was absolutely impossible to keep from dancing. That evening the word went forward that the new shed was to be inaugurated, and every man Jack aboard the ship turned out to do honour to the occasion. The rigid discipline that holds at sea was beginning to be relaxed a good deal now. Officers and men mingled together with the greatest enjoyment, Mr. Latimer danced a breathless polka with a stoker who had forgotten to wash the coal-dust from his neck; and Captain Labby deliberately hauled the Scotch carpenter out of his corner where

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he sat puffing contentedly at his pipe, and made him go through the mazes of the lancers as his partner.

"Dance, Chips!" stormed the skipper, almost breathless with excitement. "If you don't dance I'll log you and stop you a month's pay."

"Me dance?" cried Chips. "Mon, ye'd as sune expect tae see a heepopotamus dacin' a Hieland fling as me dacin' the lancers." And then and there he gave the lie to his statement, for he danced the skipper into such a perspiration as made Labby regret the impulse that had led him to challenge the grey-bearded mechanic to an exhibition of skill.

"Noo," said Chips, when Captain Labby had seated himself on the fore-bitts to wipe his forehead with a damp handkerchief as big as a royal, "ye made me dance tae please ye; I'll e'en dance a wee tae please masel'. Gie's a wee strathspey, chief."

The chief engineer struck up a strathspey in right good earnest, and away went Chips, thumbs cracking, bow-legs skipping, up and down, round about, jumping and sprawling until the eyes that watched him were sore with the quickness of his movements, until the chief was breathless; and then:

"Mon, are ye played oot a'ready?" said Chips. "Gie's a wee reel, an' I'll finish in style."

The boatswain worked his arm into ease at the shoulder and set his teeth; the fiddle shrilled madly, and away went Chips afresh, as if all

that had gone before had been merely a preliminary. Ah ! but it was a wonderful exhibition of skill and stamina ; and long before the carpenter was exhausted the boatswain was gasping like a dying fish.

"Ye ca' that dancin'?" asked Chips, when they flocked around him to congratulate him. "Laddies, ye should ha' seen me thirrty years ago, when I was young an' limmer. I'd hae danced till the dawn an' thocht naught about it, but I'm growin' auld in the hoof noo."

There had been a good deal of discussion amongst the crew as to what the purpose of this great shed could be ; but not a man had fallen to the correct idea as yet. Most of them were of opinion that it was simply to serve as a great recreation ground for the hands, when the winter fogs and gales shut down and rendered it a matter of impossibility to get outboard the ship. On the morning following the completion of the building, this theory was speedily contradicted, for whilst some of the crew were told off to cover the roof of the shed with snow, and when it was covered, to play the hose on the mass that it might freeze into a solid hillock of ice, and thus keep the warmth in the place, the remainder were detailed to get up a vast quantity of stout cases from the holds. These cases were of all shapes and sizes, and they were the very cases that had aroused such a wonderful amount of curiosity at Liverpool. Each case was numbered clearly, and as No. 1 was the first to appear

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—strict attention having been paid to their loading—it was opened at once, to reveal several segments of metal, which, fitted in place, formed a fair portion of the keel of a boat. The engineers were specially engaged in fitting these portions together, under the immediate supervision of Mr. Latimer himself, for the explorer had spent a good deal of his time in the works where the submarine had been constructed under his directions, and he knew the reason for and the position of every segment.

"He's goin' yachtin'," said Chips, when another case was opened, and still more of the keel was brought out. "He's goin' tae mak' a wee ice boatie o't, an' sail awa' wi' a favourin' breeze."

But presently another huge case was dragged up out of the hold, and when this was opened it exposed to view a beautiful petrol engine.

"No, it's nae yachtin'," said Chips, scratching thoughtfully at his head. "It's motorin', that's what. Juist motorin'—an' there's nae polis tae set up a speed limit. Weel, it's a long road tae travel for the sake o' a bit scorchin'." And whilst he talked he worked; so that at the end of the first day the contents of the cases were already beginning to assume a workmanlike shape.

The men showed a keen interest in the progress of the vessel; they worked like the heroes they were to make it complete. But long before the last bolt was in place, the long Arctic night had

settled down upon the expedition, and the sun had hidden behind the rim of the horizon, leaving only a vague twilight behind. Yet, despite the gloom, there was very much of beauty to be seen. The stars blazed with a brightness almost unbelievable by any who have not seen Arctic stars. They were glittering jewels set in a vault of dusky purple; and they gave such a light as enabled men to distinguish objects at a considerable distance, even when the moon was not shining; though when the orb of night rose in silvery splendour, there was hardly any need of the sun at all.

Marvellous were the effects of the moonlight on the rugged ice. Marvellous were the sights witnessed by the lads as they took their daily runs ashore along with the rest of the crew; for rules had been drawn up making it compulsory for every man to take a certain amount of active exercise each day, on pain of punishment.

But there have been many books of Arctic travel written, and the sights seen up beyond the Arctic Circle are almost as well known to the boys of to-day as are the common objects of the sea-shore. There is no need to tell of them here and now—perhaps later we might be able to speak of the wonders of the Aurora Borealis; of the mighty showers of meteors; of the strange phosphorescent glow that seemed to shine from the ice itself. But now we must go on with the construction of the submarine; for the time is drawing near when four valiant

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heroes are about to trust their lives and fortunes to that small craft, and venture upon a journey such as might have appalled the stoutest heart.

The submarine, which had been named the *Pioneer*, swiftly took shape. She was a beautiful craft, almost a toy as she stood there on the rough stocks they had built for her. She measured sixty feet from stem to stern, and eleven feet from keel to conning tower, whilst eleven feet was her greatest breadth. She was shaped almost like a cigar; and was built of nickel steel, light and tough, capable of withstanding almost any rough usage. But she differed from the majority of submarines in that she was built double—that is, there was a smaller vessel inside the larger one; and between the two hulls—though the engineers called them skins—was a space some six inches across. Presently, when the submarine was ready to start her precarious voyage, the air would be exhausted from this space, leaving practically a vacuum, and the effect of this would be that whatever heat was generated inside the submarine by the engine and the electrical radiators, would be retained therein, exactly after the fashion of a Thermos flask. For under the Polar ice it might be taken for granted that severe cold would be encountered, and Mr. Latimer had no desire for a submarine full of frozen men to reach the Pole—and stop there.

As the *Pioneer* was constructed exclusively

for peace and not for war, there was no need to devote valuable space to torpedoes; though there was a certain provision of explosives awaiting shipment in the holds; which explosives it was hoped would come in useful at a later date, by enabling the *Pioneer's* crew to blast a way for themselves from the under-seas to the surface of the ice about the Pole.

Internally, the craft was fitted with every imaginable device that could help her to achieve her object. She had no fewer than a dozen compasses; and each one of these had been tested and retested until it was practically perfect. Of course, up in those high latitudes, in the near neighbourhood of the magnetic pole, all compasses are subject to much greater deviations and variations than down south; but the mariner's compass had been a particular study of Mr. Latimer's, whilst Dr. Vyner knew as much of the subject as do most scientists. The *Enterprise* was further north than the magnetic pole already, and the course steered by the *Pioneer* in her venturesome journey would be south instead of north—as the needle of the compass would naturally point to the magnetic pole instead of to the true geographical pole. By dint of a system of careful calculations, worked out to the minutest fraction of a second, Mr. Latimer knew exactly what course he must steer to reach the Pole; and unless some tremendous obstacle cropped up on his track, there seemed a fair chance of his gaining his object—which was

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to plant the British Flag at a spot in 90° N. latitude.

But the compass was only one item; by this instrument it was possible to steer a safe course; but without some active force all the steering in the world would have availed them nothing. Hence the neat little engine, capable of developing some hundred horse-power; which engine in its turn actuated an electrical engine, which again in turn drove the propeller at a tremendous speed. It was calculated that the *Pioneer* could be driven at a rate of about eight knots per hour, so that it would be necessary for her to run almost seventy hours under water before reaching the Pole. After that she would have to return; so it was necessary that she should carry a large store of petrol. This fluid was to be placed in the ballast tanks, for economy of space; and as fast as a tank was emptied of the fuel, water would be admitted to keep the balance correct. But what with engines, ballast tanks, compressed air tanks, and stores, there was but little room within the vessel for human beings, and at the most only four could hope to make the journey.

"I shall go, of course," said Mr. Latimer, as the submarine approached completion. "But I dare not order any man to accompany me, for there is, without doubt, a tremendous risk of our never returning alive."

"Well, you may count me in," said Dr. Vyner. "I've always said that I'd die happy

if I could go down in a submarine and up in an airship; and if I go with you I'll be ready to die half-happy, at all events." He passed it off as a joke, as brave men will; but he knew quite well that the slightest mistake in the submarine's construction might easily mean the death of every soul aboard.

Mr. Latimer shook hands with his trusty lieutenant, and his voice was husky with deep feelings as he replied: "My dear Vyner, there isn't a man in all the world I'd rather have with me than you. But—don't you owe a duty to the men we leave behind? You're their doctor, and if any scurvy should come——"

"Don't worry about that," said the surgeon calmly. "I've taken old Captain Labby into my confidence, and given him the run of the surgery; he knows as much about doctoring as I do; and he's got lots of nerve. Before we start I'll mix up great bottles of every kind of medicine he could possibly want, and leave him the key—and there you are. Aboard a ship like this, Latimer, a surgeon is as much use as a brass band—less, perhaps."

"But then—there are the others to consider," said the explorer.

The two boys were present during this discussion; now they started forward as if moved by the same spring.

"You promised us we should go," they cried together.

Mr. Latimer's face grew very grave. "Think

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of the danger, boys," he said. "Think that you may never see your homes again!"

"Well, if we see the North Pole we can do without our homes, I guess," said Monro quietly.

"Say, Uncle Harry, you made a promise, and I guess it's a white man's job to keep that promise— isn't it?"

"Well, well, boys, I was only trying you. Of course, I intend to keep my promise; but I was just wondering whether now the critical moment was so near, you'd funk it. It isn't the sort of adventure to appeal to most men."

"Funk it!" cried Harold. "We aren't of the funking kind, pater. We came up here with the intention of reaching the Pole; and so, if you don't mind, we'll make our try."

After that there was no further discussion as to who should make up the *Pioneer's* crew. From that day forward Harold busied himself in studying the engines of the craft, under the directions of the chief engineer, and by the time the expedition was ready to start he had more than a working knowledge of the submarine's powerful heart.

The work went forward apace, for a keen enthusiasm seemed to be growing up aboard. Every man worked his hardest, and by the middle of November the *Pioneer* was almost ready to commence her journey. It may well be understood that in two hearts at least of the many aboard the *Enterprise* a wild exultation was growing up. Monro and his cousin hardly

knew how to contain themselves. The dream of their lives was coming to fulfilment; they were going to set their feet where as yet no human feet had ever trod. Is it any wonder that they forgot their hardships? For the hardships were growing now, as the cold increased. They were boys of a high courage; they were embarking on an adventure that promised to live in history. Everything pointed to a prospect of almost appalling danger, but they cared nothing for the perils that must beset their every path. They lost sight of drawbacks and discomforts, looking forward with a great satisfaction to arriving at the Pole itself.

"We'll take a short trial trip, just to see that everything's in order," said Mr. Latimer, on the day when the *Pioneer* was reported as being ready. "It won't do to undertake such a voyage as we contemplate without knowing something about the craft."

After that pronouncement the excitement grew immeasurably. It seemed as if the hours were too short for the vast wealth of delirium they contained; time after time did the two lads pinch themselves hard to make sure they were not dreaming. But after one such pinch, when his arm felt as if it were black and blue to the shoulder, Monro came to the conclusion that everything was real; and that the voyage was about to come off—it was no dream.

It was in the last week of November that the *Pioneer* was launched, and her launching

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was a momentous affair. The *Enterprise* carried a stout spar on her deck ; this spar was rigged up on the mainmast, and so stayed by mighty hawsers as to become capable of bearing any weight. Shackles were bolted into the submarine's hull ; the shed was dismantled on the starboard side ; a gigantic tackle was fixed to the *Pioneer's* bow, and another to her stern. When all was in readiness the crew set to work to excavate an opening in the ice alongside ; an opening big enough to form a temporary dock for the little craft. By dint of using judicious charges of explosives it was no very difficult matter to open out such a dock, and presently everything was ready. There was a clatter of steam-winchies driven at their hardest, little by little the *Pioneer* rose clear of the deck, swung outboard and was lowered delicately to the water. There she floated, with only her conning-tower appearing above the surface ; and—she was ready for the venture.

CHAPTER X

THE PIONEER'S TRIAL TRIP

"KEEP the ice clear from this hole," shouted Mr. Latimer to Captain Labby.

"Ay, ay, sir. Good luck go with you."

The explorer put his head down as a hearty cheer burst out from the assembled crew, and drew the cover of the conning-tower down after him. All was in readiness for a start; the engines were throbbing with a splendid note of power. Harold stood ready, one hand on the clutch that should throw the whirling shaft into engagement with the screw—waited until his father shouted "Go ahead!" and then, with a single turn of the wrist, the submarine was set in motion. Mr. Latimer took up his post in the conning-tower, with Monro at his side; and peered out of the narrow windows of toughened glass. On the very bow of the *Pioneer* was a powerful searchlight which was actuated by a battery inside the hull; this searchlight was shaded aft, so as not to blind observers; but it threw a mighty light forward, revealing every detail plainly to the watching eyes.

Down went the vessel, sinking gracefully by the head, until she was completely submerged. Her interior was lit up by a few incandescent

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lamps, but all about her was the grim darkness of the under-seas. An uncanny feeling transmitted itself to every soul on board as the ship tilted forward evenly; perhaps they would never taste the open air of heaven again. But it was no time for fears—Harold at the engines stood ready for the word that should send the ship forward like an arrow; Monro stood at the wheel, watching every motion of his uncle's fingers.

"Go ahead!" said Mr. Latimer, and the *Pioneer* thrilled with speed. Forward she flashed, right under that Polar ice—diving deeper at every forward stride—until there remained no possibility of her back suffering from contact with the under-surface of the frozen covering to the sea.

"She's doing all I expected of her," said Mr. Latimer to Dr. Vyner, who was seated near at hand, regulating the air-pressure from the tanks. "If she can keep this up for a week we've done our work."

Monro steered deftly, yet kept an eye on the glass port in front of him; and, peering keenly, he was able to make out some little of his surroundings. It was a wonderful sight. High above was a whitish sheen that told of the presence of the ice; all about was a dull green—the Polar sea. Vast unsightly shapes flitted to and fro; once a monster, like nothing the lad had ever seen in his life, swam easily towards the submarine and peered curiously in at the

ports, its huge eyes staring weirdly right into Monro's. For a moment a strange feeling of fear came to the lad's heart. It seemed as if the gaping mouth revealed below the eyes must inevitably swallow the entire craft; but the glass was so constructed as to magnify considerably, and in reality the great skate—for a skate it was—was only as big as a fair-sized dining-table. But it was a belligerent skate, and did not welcome the presence of this round monster with the single flashing eye. It gave a swift flick of its tail and swam forward like a torpedo; turning, it charged right at the *Pioneer's* bow.

"Give her full speed, Harold!" cried Mr. Latimer. "Mind your helm, Monro!"

There was a dull shock, the submarine reeled a little, steadied, and pieces of the skate rose about the conning-tower, whilst a faint red tinge grew up in the water about.

"He's had his gruel," said the explorer. The *Pioneer* went forward without injury, and, as if the lesson had proved salutary, none of the other strange denizens of the deep offered any molestation for half an hour. Sharks flitted past, gazing out of cruel eyes at this new monster; but they were too cowardly to attempt any attack. They flitted away with flickering tails, and returned with other sharks, all of which took up positions near to the submarine and swam on resolutely, keeping it company like an escort.

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It was all too eerie for words. It was as if the ship floated in another world altogether. Nothing below here was like anything they had seen above. In place of the vast and blinding expanse of whiteness that had met their eyes for week after week was now a cool and refreshing green; instead of flying clouds of ptarmigan and eider duck winging their way to the south, were now shoals of the most remarkable fish. And all the time the steady pulsation of the engine sounded like the beating of a mighty heart, speaking of resolve and high endeavour.

By means of a lever it was possible so to alter the position of the searchlight in the bow that it threw its light upward as well as forward, and by so doing the under-surface of the ice was brought plainly into view. The *Pioneer* was not fitted with a periscope, as are ordinary submarines, because such an invention would have been worse than useless. But through the bull's-eyes of the conning-tower it was possible to see plainly; whilst at the extreme summit of the conning-tower was a simple contrivance which caused a bell to ring so soon as the submarine rose to such a height as to endanger her safety against the ice.

Wonder added itself to wonder—the ragged underside of the ice was covered with great boulders of rock, with strange tangles of seaweed, in amongst which lurked other monsters, impossible of classification. There were long sinuous

bodies floating out at strange angles from deep cavities, as if the original sea-serpent had taken refuge in some under-sea cavern, leaving only its tail protruding. There were squat brutes with many arms—large cuttlefish these—their dull eyes glowing with some strange unearthly light. Giant crabs clung to the roughnesses here and there, and through all this amazing revelation of a teeming life even here almost beneath the Pole, the *Pioneer* went forward resolutely.

"If only we had provisioned her, we might have made the dash straightway," said Dr. Vyner. "She's working like a charm." As he spoke the words there came a jarring clatter from aft; the steady beat of the engines stopped suddenly; the submarine gave a queer lurching heave, and became stationary. They heard Harold juggling with levers; presently they heard his voice:

"Something's gone wrong with the engines, pater; I can't get them to move."

It was a moment to make the stoutest blanch, to make the toughest heart quail with fear. They were under ice that was nowhere less than forty feet thick; much of it was probably nearer a hundred feet; ice that had been frozen for centuries. To rise to the surface was impossible; and the submarine was useless—something awful had happened, something that they could not understand. It looked as if there was nothing left save to wait for death with what courage

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they might command. But they were not of the stamp to wait idly for death so long as there was the slightest possibility of escape.

"The cranks jammed all of a sudden," said Harold, who had detached a light and was examining the bowels of his engine carefully. There was nothing to be seen likely to cause the stoppage, but though they turned and twisted, though they hove and strained, nothing would start the engines again. Mr. Latimer looked at Dr. Vynner, and despite his efforts his face turned white. Monro still stood at the wheel, from which he had never moved; but his straining nerves caught the suspense that hung about the ship; and try as he would, he could not fight down the heavy sense of danger. Now that the *Pioneer* was stopped the fish swimming about her became bolder; they swam defiantly at the strange object, and butted with their heads until the fabric shook strongly; but all they gained for their pains was a headache; and after a while they desisted from their efforts. Still the engines would not start; the position was growing more dangerous every minute. Unless something could be done it seemed that they were doomed to an awful death. As long as the air held out they might manage to endure; but because this was only a short trial trip Mr. Latimer had not troubled to charge all the compressed air tanks to their full capacity. There was enough air to last them for a day and a night, but after that—only death remained.

A sudden wild cry from Monro, and Mr. Latimer flew to the conning-tower thinking that some deep-sea monster was about to attack them. But it was not that which had drawn the cry from the lad's lips. He was pointing with a shaky finger to a point on the starboard bow, where a faint sheen lightened the green of the water.

"There must be a hole in the ice," he said weakly. "I looked back as we left the *Enterprise*, and there was a sheen just like that in the sea."

"That's what it is, my boy," said Mr. Latimer hoarsely. "Now, if we can manage to get so far there's a chance of salvation yet. Once we're on the surface we can tackle this job with stout hearts."

Harold tested the accumulators with extreme care. "I think we might manage to keep her going for a few minutes at a pinch, pater," he said. "I'll do my best, but we'd better put out every light."

They had already extinguished the search-light; they needed every unit of electricity they could command. So in grim darkness within and grimmer darkness without, the *Pioneer* began to move forward very gingerly. She seemed hardly to crawl; the power in the accumulators was so nearly exhausted that the propeller flapped the water as languidly as the wing of a dying bird. But gradually the luminous patch drew nearer; it broadened perceptibly, it grew brighter. Inch

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by inch—with many a faltering pause—the *Pioneer* stole on ; and those on board held their breaths. Would she manage it ? was the question in every heart ; would she stop dead before she reached the centre of that mild glow that stood for life and everything dear ?

Three times she stopped, and three times Harold coaxed another fluttering beat from the propeller. They could not see each other's face ; which was perhaps as well ; but twice Monro felt his uncle reach up and wipe the damp sweat from his forehead. The lad was in a quiver himself ; his bones seemed to have turned to water—but he steered deftly, using every atom of his skill.

"Lift her !" suddenly cried Mr. Latimer, and Dr. Vynar turned the compressed air into the ballast tanks. Up shot the *Pioneer*, up and up ; there was a grating shock ; a sliding rush ; and the eyes that had previously seen only a dense greenness, now saw a strange whiteness flash downwards past them. A shout of triumph from Monro—he could not have kept it back had he been under sentence of death—and the submarine's conning-tower emerged into the pure air ; they saw the luminous glow of the Northern stars lighting their surroundings brightly.

It was the work of a moment to throw back the scuttle that gave egress from the conning-tower ; and once it was open Mr. Latimer took a long look around.

"This is simply providential," he said rever-

ently. "We are lying in an open space—quite a large pond, in fact. I don't pretend to know how it got here—perhaps a warm current has caused it, so that the ice cannot form. But however it was caused it has undoubtedly saved our lives."

"We'll set to work now and see if we can't repair this engine," said Harold. It was very cold; colder on the surface than under the sea, but in spite of that fact they turned to at once. They had brought oil lamps with them as a reserve of light; soon a couple of these were burning brightly; and Harold was busy stripping the engines, calling on all his skill. Now that they knew they were safe for the time being, they could work coolly, there was no need for frenzied endeavour; and after an hour of steady toil Harold was able to pronounce the engines ready for work.

"At least, I think so," he said. "It all depends on the trial."

With a swiftly indrawn breath, he opened the throttle. At once the steady pulsation commenced; the engines beat as resolutely as ever. When the clutches were engaged the *Pioneer* travelled easily to the limits of her natural dock. They tried and tried again and again, stopping the engine suddenly and starting it as suddenly—nothing happened. Under any circumstances the engines worked well, and when the unanimous verdict was given, that it was safe to make a fresh start, Harold held out his hand. In it was

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a strip of metal, bent and twisted out of all recognition.

"I found that jammed in the main bearing, pater," he said. "I wonder how it got there? It looks as if it had been placed so that it would gradually work its way down, and then jam; not so that it would jam at once."

"It must have been carelessness on the part of one of the engineers," said the explorer slowly. But he was thinking of the cut topsail-sheet; and a great unrest was growing up in his soul.

"I don't want to frighten the boys," he said aside to Vyner, "but it seems to me as if there were some treachery surrounding us. We must set Labby on his guard—and we must be on guard ourselves."

They hesitated many times before committing their fortunes to the deep again; Mr. Latimer even went the length of offering his companions an alternative.

"If you've the slightest reason to believe any harm might come of our attempt," he said, "we'll leave the submarine here and trek back to the ship over the ice."

But Vyner voiced the opinion of all when he said: "Seeing that we're going to the Pole in this craft, we might as well get accustomed to her tricks."

Finally, they drew the cover of the conning-tower over them, and the engines were started afresh. Water was admitted to the ballast tanks;

the submarine dived slowly; went deeper—the searchlight blazed out, and she darted gallantly away from the opening.

Mr. Latimer gave a course to Monro. "Steer straight for the ship," he said, and the *Pioneer* throbbed her way back along the line she had travelled before.

The engines worked like a charm; their beat was as steady as that of a well-found human heart. So that in no great time they saw again the luminosity that told them of the nearness of the *Enterprise*, and within a few minutes more they had reached the safe shelter of the parent ship.

"Heave the *Pioneer* on board," said Mr. Latimer; "we won't run any risks with her. Captain Labby, be good enough to come to my room."

That night Harold and Monro slipped along the decks at about ten o'clock and climbed noiselessly to the conning-tower of the submarine. Each lad had a revolver in his pocket; and they slept that night beside the engines, lest any dastardly attempt should be made to deter the projected start for the Pole. But nothing happened. Whoever had been responsible for the damage made no further attempt to cripple the submarine; perhaps the scoundrel thought that the work he had already done would assert itself in time. Each of the four had sworn to keep the matter secret, in the hope that the traitor would betray himself. With the sole

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exception of the skipper, not a man had been taken into their confidence. But both the lads were thinking of the same man that night—thinking of the second mate.

Morning came—or, rather, the hour of morning came; and the ship wakened to life. Like shadows the lads slipped down to their room, after sealing the lid of the conning-tower, and both listened intently outside the door of the second mate's cabin. But beyond the officer's even breathing they heard nothing. Later in the morning Harold took the chief engineer into the hull of the *Pioneer*, where the lad explained just enough to show that something had gone wrong. Together the two completely overhauled the working parts, until the chief swore that the engine was fit to drive the vessel half round the world.

CHAPTER XI

THE FIRST ATTEMPT—UNDER THE ICE

"GOOD-BYE, Captain Labby. Good-bye, men. Keep the ice-dock open, and don't get into any sort of mischief whilst we're away. Mr. Macpherson, I shall look to you to keep a light burning above the hole, to guide us back to the ship."

"Ye can trust me as ye'd trust yourself, sir."

They were about to start on their daring dash at last. The submarine had made another trial trip, during which nothing had happened out of the ordinary. She was provisioned for a lengthy voyage; every tank was full of petrol; she carried enough compressed air to keep her crew alive for over a week. Also, she had a small but choice selection of explosives, which might come in handy to blow a way to the surface in case of any mishap; and in a safe place Mr. Latimer had stowed a couple of cylinders containing records which he hoped and intended to deposit on the North Pole, to show all new-comers that he was the first man to tread on that mystic spot.

"Good-bye, Chips. Mind I'm not saying anything that might be a libel, but you would do

well to keep your eye on the second mate. He'll stand a lot of watching." Harold looked meaningfully into the carpenter's eyes as he spoke, and Chips rubbed his hands on his trousers.

"I'll watch him as a cat watches a mouse, laddie. I've got een in ma heid, ma son; I ken fine there's something happened by-ordinar'. Gin I hac sae much as a wee thocht tae hang a suspeecion on, I'll hang it, ay, as sure's ma name's Macfie. Yon sharger's no freend o' mine, an' I'd lo'e tae catch him trippin'."

The four adventurers took their places in the *Pioncer*, which was already afloat. Harold gave his pet engines a final trial, and heard the low, clear note of perfection that told him they were working as sweetly as engines could; Mr. Latimer drew down the cover of the conning-tower, the two ballast tanks that enabled the ship to dive were filled, and away the expedition started Northward Ho! What would be its fate? Would they find a grave in those seas that fringe the Pole? Would those who watched the dome of the submarine disappear from view wait on in hopeless suspense for months, perhaps for years, and never see that ugly object reappear? Four men were taking their lives in their hands in the endeavour to make history; yes, four men, for the two boys had taken on brevet manhood, as well they deserved to do. They were as ready to face the dangers of the under-seas as ever was grown man; they cognised no thought of fear, all they cared was that the adventure should be

carried through successfully, and then—well, they hardly troubled to think of the afterwards. So long as they were in at the death that would be enough for them.

There was a strange silence in the interior of the *Pioneer* as she slid smoothly forward under the ice. Beyond the pulsations of the engines, there was nothing to be heard, save for the slight hiss of escaping air from the compressed air tanks. The foul gases of the interior were allowed to escape by means of a cunning arrangement of valves. In the interval that had elapsed between the first trial trip and this venture, Dr. Vyner and the chief engineer had constructed between them a contrivance that regulated the outflow of air to a nicety, so that the atmosphere of the submarine was constantly pure and breathable.

Ahead of the *Pioneer* streamed a constant blaze of white light, like a beacon drawing her forward resolutely to an appointed goal. But beyond that steady shaft of radiance there was nothing—only the dull green darkness of the ice-covered waters. By this time, however, all four of the explorers had grown accustomed to the unusual sensation of being far under the sea's surface; the feeling of ever-present danger had worn off. They laughed and joked together like four children; and but for the narrow limits of the vessel that was to be their home for a possible week or more, they would have skylarked with the best.

"Mind you," said Mr. Latimer in an interval, "we're trying a very big thing. We have no proof that we shall succeed; in fact, the more I think of it the more disposed I am to think that we might fail."

"Come, come," interrupted Dr. Vyner; "that's no way for an explorer to speak. Why, Latimer, think we've succeeded already, and we're bound to command success. Well begun is half done, and goodness knows we've begun well enough."

"Yes, I'll admit that. But I'm leader of this expedition, and everything depends on my theories. Now, I've got a theory that between here and the North Pole lies nothing but ice-covered water, with perhaps an open stretch of sea round about the Pole. But, on the other hand, what if there is a great Polar continent? What if we get so far and find ourselves unable to go farther? Then—well, we'll treat the emergencies as they arise. We won't despair; but I'm just a trifle nervous, you know. Failure means my ruin—absolutely. So we won't fail—eh, boys?"

"That's the way to talk," said the surgeon gleefully. "And now I vote we take a meal."

They were compelled to eat as best they could. To cook in any great style was out of the question. The most they could do was to brew a pot of tea or coffee on the electric hot-plate that the chief engineer had fitted; and with this and a tin of meat and some ship's

biscuit, they had to rest content. They carried a small store of brandy with them, only to be used in cases of emergency; but despite the plainness of the fare and the difficulties attendant upon its consumption, they ate right heartily, and talked together most cheerfully. A spirit of optimism grew up about them as the day wore on. They had nothing to guide them as to the state of the hours beyond the beautiful chronometer which formed a part of the submarine's equipment; they had not even the faint twilight that hung over the south for an hour or two every day, when the sun reached its highest point. To keep going satisfactorily it was necessary for them to split up into watches; Mr. Latimer and Monro took one watch, Dr. Vyner and Harold took the other. By this time it had become possible to leave the engine to its own devices in a great measure; beyond occasional attention the machinery ran itself, but it was necessary for one man always to steer and keep a look-out.

The first stages of this memorable voyage were very similar to those described during the trial trip. That is to say, numerous big fish swam inquiringly alongside and poked their distorted noses against the glass windows of the conning-tower. Now and then some finny giant would try its strength against this racing monstrosity that had come to disturb its solitudes, but invariably the result was the same—the *Pioneer* was not disposed to pause for such

trifling obstacles. Occasionally the bell that connected with the depth-recording apparatus would ring warningly, and then it was necessary to allow a little more water to enter the ballast tanks, lest the summit of the submarine should come in contact with low-lying projections of ice. But so carefully was the vessel navigated that such ringings were the exception rather than the rule. The clear ray from the searchlight, thrown slightly upwards, revealed every obstacle as it was approached, and so there was every prospect of a successful termination to the hazardous voyage. But Mr. Latimer could not sleep that first night. If his theory proved to be false, nothing but failure could await them, and failure meant—no; he dared not think what failure meant.

On and ever on, cleaving a sure path to the north, the *Pioneer* went gallantly; and as the smooth throb of her engines never faltered, the hearts of all on board grew high and light with hope. They said the path to the Pole was open, and they were sure of success.

It was shortly after midnight that Harold and Dr. Vyner took over the watch. Monro was oiling the engine when Harold relieved him; he yawned sleepily. They said little, and almost as little was said in the conning-tower where Vyner relieved Mr. Latimer.

"I haven't seen anything worth speaking of," said the leader of the expedition. "It has grown a little colder, but that is all. Yahoo!

but it takes it out of a man this constant staring ahead. You and Harold had better halve the look-out. You'll find it less wearing that way."

He bent over the compass and examined it carefully—it swung immediately below the look-out ports in the front of the tower. The *Pioneer's* head was pointing almost due South—as was only natural, for the magnetic pole was far astern. Mr. Latimer smiled in a well-pleased fashion, and climbed out of the eyrie. Then he bundled himself into his blankets, and attempted to sleep. All in vain; try as he would visions of failure troubled him. He heard the even breathing of Monro, close beside him. The lad had simply rolled over and gone to sleep instant—Mr. Latimer envied his nephew his freedom from care. There were so many things to cause the explorer worry; apart from the possibility of failure there was always the knowledge that three other lives beside his own were in his care. He closed his eyes, and tried to fight down the depression of his senses, listened to the chug-chug of the engines, the slight hiss from the air valves. Then he began to doze off, just as Harold left the machinery and went into the conning-tower to relieve the surgeon. Dr. Vyner seated himself beside the engine—Mr. Latimer felt a drowsiness creep over him.

There was a sudden shivering shock, the *Pioneer* seemed to spin round on her axis, she lifted her bow high until she seemed to be stand-

ing on her screws ; then, as her nose struck the ice above she fell back with a crash, lifted once more, and spun like a cork.

It seemed as if the end of things had come. What had happened ? Had the submarine run her nose into some vast berg lying deep below the ice-level ; had she been caught up by a submarine volcano and made into a toy ? Instinctively Mr. Latimer sprang to the conning-tower, and peered forth ; nothing was to be seen save disturbed water. Dr. Vyner had shut the throttle as the first shock came ; Monro had roused and was staring open-mouthed about him.

"I saw nothing," gasped Harold, watching the swinging compass card fascinatedly. "It came without any warning. Look, pater, there's nothing to be seen."

He pointed out through the ports ; and, as he said, the water was quite untenanted. There came another startling shock, and again the submarine hove herself awkwardly ; then she settled down on an even keel again. There followed a strange rasping sound that was more a shudder than an actual noise. Another shake, lessening in violence this time ; another—then a great calm, all the more startling because of the stopping of the engines.

"We must be sinking," thought Mr. Latimer, though he did not speak his thought aloud. "That is the only explanation. We must be dropping down to the very bed of the sea." And as he thought thus Dr. Vyner opened the

throttle again and the interior of the *Pioneer* grew full of sound.

"She's not damaged here," he said cheerfully, shouting aloud from his post. "She's running as smoothly as ever she did." Harold swung the wheel over, and the lubber's line crept slowly back towards south. Once it had reached that point it remained there unwaveringly, and the bell of the speed indicator rang assuringly.

"It's strange; it's more than strange," said Mr. Latimer in a dazed fashion. "Logically we ought to be lying at the bottom of the sea by this time, but we seem to be afloat still. Let her ascend a little, Harold; see how far we've sunk."

In a moment, after the compressed air had driven some little of the ballast out, the bell at the end of the depth-recorder rang to show the submarine was close to the surface ice. Then there came a gasp from Harold; he pointed through the look-out ports. And following his point Mr. Latimer saw the bulky shape of a giant whale—a very monster amongst monsters, a brute that seemed to measure close on two hundred feet from head to flukes. They had one glimpse of the thing, enough to show them that a great chunk of flesh had been torn from its back, then it sounded, and the submarine rocked to that mighty motion.

"I think I understand it," said the explorer, as the *Pioneer* steadied to the stride. "We must have run over the brute's back whilst it was

asleep; and feeling our keel cutting into its flesh it gave a heave, naturally enough. That would serve to send us spinning as we did—it's a wonder we weren't split wide open and sent to the bottom forthwith—and then it rubbed itself against us in the hope of relieving the pain. But what a mercy we didn't charge full into it—we'd have stuck there till the crack of doom if we had! Let's hope he doesn't come back with the idea of revenge, or else——"

He broke off, but all knew his thoughts. But they had made up their minds to face any difficulty in pursuit of their quest, and they were not the stamp of men to be turned back by the first untoward incident. Dr. Vyner closely overhauled the engines and pronounced them intact; Harold and his father subjected the *Pioneer* to every conceivable test, that her stability might be proved through and through; try as they would they could find no defect. The submarine was uninjured.

CHAPTER XII

IN A SUBMARINE CAVE

THE next day passed without incident. The speed indicator showed them that they had maintained a good eight knots throughout. When evening came—six o'clock they called evening, for they had nothing else to guide them—they calculated that they had covered two hundred and fifty miles of the distance they had to go—allowing for the run of the current. In another thirty hours they might expect to reach their goal; and when that goal was reached—what was to be done? They had arranged it all beforehand. Once their reckoning placed them within measurable distance of the Pole they would do their best to break a way through the surface ice by means of explosives. They had a cunning arrangement fixed in the roof of the submarine's hull by means of which a charge of dynamite could be thrown against any obstacle above—and, having broken through, they would take such observations as were necessary to fix their exact position to a second of distance. After that they would be guided by circumstances. If they had come to the surface close to the Pole they would press on, leaving the submarine

behind ; would place the British flag and their records on the point that represented 90° N. latitude. Then, after taking a survey of the surroundings, and such further observations of the natural phenomena as would be necessary to convince the outside world that the impossible had been achieved, they would get back to their craft.

And so, as it came towards night on that second day, the hearts of all the "Pioneers" beat high with expectation. It seemed too good to be believed. Another day and a half might see them standing on the mystic Pole, triumphant conquerors—having done that which men had striven vainly to do for ages almost past belief. The sense of depression had left Mr. Latimer ; he was as hopeful as the most hopeful there ; and the prospect of success tasted sweet in his mouth. The engines had worked unfalteringly, despite the severe trials to which they had been subjected ; they were still working splendidly, with that easy beat which told of perfect accord.

"I think we're in a position to disprove one thing at all events," said Mr. Latimer cheerfully, as they sat down to take their evening meal. "And that is, that the theory as to a vast Arctic continent surrounding the Pole is wrong. If there had been such a continent we could not have failed to come across it by this time. Harold, you don't see anything ahead there, do you ?"

"Nothing but a shadow, pater, and the

water is a trifle milky, but it's been gradually growing that way for an hour."

Mr. Latimer climbed up into the conning-tower and looked out. There was a change in the appearance of the sea—it had become almost opaque; yet the opaqueness was not sufficient to hide the look-out ahead. It was more a cloudiness in the water than an actual discoloration, much as if a tumbler had suddenly been filled with very cold water—the sea was fogged.

"We've probably run into a cold current," said the explorer, gazing in every direction. "That's the only thing that would account for such a happening. It would alter the aspect of the water if a cold current met a hot one. How does she steer, my boy? If there's a cross-current running she'll be steering badly."

Harold replied that she was steering like a duck; and twirled the wheel in his hands to prove his words. The *Pioneer* answered every spoke as certainly as she had ever done.

"Well, it's nothing to cause uneasiness, that's certain," said the explorer, resuming his meal. "We must get accustomed to seeing strange sights down here. I've noticed water of this kind down in the Indian Ocean. I've seen it as white as milk. What were we talking about? Oh, yes, the imaginary Arctic continent. Well, I don't see how there can be one. Everything goes to show that it is non-existent. We have run through open water to a spot less than two hundred and fifty miles away from the Pole,

and whatever continent there might be can't be a very big one."

"Stop her; go astern—there's something ahead," cried Harold sharply, and the wheel spun round furiously in his grasp. Dr. Vyner made a leap that took him to the throttle; with one wrench he threw the lever over, and the engine's note died suddenly, to be taken up again as she went astern full speed. Mr. Latimer held his breath, expecting a tremendous shock; Monro philosophically went on eating, for, as he said: "If it was a question of dying, me for the full tummy."

Harold was still working away at the wheel, spinning the submarine round on her heel until her bow pointed due north by compass, due south actually. Then Mr. Latimer recovered himself, and sprang to his son's side.

"What is it, Harold?"

The lad's face was streaming with sweat; his hands trembled on the wheel; he was white and shaking. "It showed up all of a sudden, just like a tremendous cliff. If I hadn't stopped her when I did we should have been on it and smashed to bits. I don't know how we managed to escape—it was marvellous. Yes, pater, it was land if I ever saw land in my life."

Mr. Latimer groaned in a hollow fashion. "Perhaps you were mistaken, my boy. Perhaps it was another whale."

"No such luck; I've seen whales and I've seen land. That was land."

"Well, we must make sure; we'd be fools to turn back unless we were certain the way was stopped. Turn her round, and we'll creep ahead again."

No one thought of eating now as the *Pioneer* swung round in a half-circle, and steadied on her rightful course again. The engines were set a-going at dead-slow; the submarine went forward at a mere crawl—so slowly, indeed, that it seemed she had no motion whatsoever. Dimly through the water appeared a vast barrier—at first it was nothing but a shadow; then, as the slow seconds passed, it revealed itself as a sheer cliff of virgin rock. It was smoothed by the washing of the Polar seas, here and there jagged protuberances showed, deadly fangs on which the *Pioneer* might have split to fragments. Truly they had had a marvellous escape; but for Harold's quickness nothing could have saved them. They pictured what the scene would have been like—the gaping bows, the intrushing water, the absolute helplessness of them all. For there is no danger like that met in a submarine. In the air or on the surface there is always a chance for life; under the sea, cooped up in a little death-trap, and under the ice at that, there is nothing but death when anything goes wrong.

"We won't despair yet," said Mr. Latimer calmly, after he had taken a long look at the cliff. "We'll creep along it and survey it thoroughly, and perhaps we may find that it is merely

an island, an isolated pinnacle of rock. It may not reach to the ice even. We'll ascend as far as we can and explore."

But though the *Pioneer* went up until the depth-recorder rang a loud note of alarm, there was no loophole to be discovered. Evidently the land reached right to the surface, where it would be covered with ice as completely as was the sea. They searched about and found nothing to give them the smallest hope; then they descended swiftly, dropping through inter-oceanic space like a plummet, down and down until it seemed as if they must inevitably either touch bottom or come out on the other side of the world. And still they found nothing that offered assistance in any way—they were blocked by an impassable barrier.

"No, not yet," said the explorer defiantly. "We've not come so far to be turned back by the first obstacle. Why, we're explorers—not children. Come, come, boys; we're made of sterner stuff than to give up hope at the first appearance of failure. What if this is a continent? There may be some way of getting to windward of it yet. But I do not think it is a continent; I am firmly of opinion that this is simply a barrier reef—like the reef off the northern coast of Australia. And if it be such a reef—good, there will probably be passages through it, worn by the currents and the tides. The water is held in bondage above by the ice; it must have some outlet. We have seen that

■

there is a current setting due north ; now let us prove our case. Stop the engines, turn the searchlight full on a certain point of rock, and watch."

It was done. The *Pioneer* ascended slowly, then Harold, who was still at the wheel, kept her nose almost touching a projecting rock. Nothing happened ; the bow swerved neither to right nor left. Mr. Latimer gave a cry of pleasure.

"What did I say?" he demanded. "If the current were deflected either to right or left by this land, we must have been moved with it. We are a body as light as water, and if the water passes to either side we must pass with it. Forward! We will not turn back until we are certain that all hope of advancing is over."

He showed a fine courage, and his companions took their tone from him. They had suffered from a painful depression when it seemed that further progress were impossible ; now, however, they betrayed every evidence of being as sanguine as their leader.

"That's the way to talk," said Monro eagerly. "England and America for ever! We're not going back so long as there's a road forward."

Mr. Latimer, however, said nothing of the fear that would persist in presenting itself. He had argued aloud that as the current was not deflected it must, in some way, pass through the barrier ; but to himself he said : "What if the current ceased away down to the south? We

have no proof that it did not ; all the proof goes to show the contrary. Still, we must not despair."

Then began a systematic search. The great headlight was slewed so that it was possible for the *Pioneer* to creep along the face of the rock slowly, the while a constant flood of light was poured on its front. Time after time the submarine was checked and thrust in nearer to ascertain the meaning of a darker patch of rock ; as often it was hauled out again, when the dark patch proved to be merely some fault in the formation, and nothing in the shape of a cavern or a subterranean passage.

Once, however, Harold, on watch in the conning-tower, gave a cry of delight. His father was at his side in a moment ; together father and son peered through the illuminated depths, to see a vast orifice opening in the wall. Its upper side was plainly revealed ; great tangles of weed floated from it, forming what was almost a curtain to hide the entrance, but Harold's keen young eyes had seen beyond the kelp to the opening at the farther side. There was a queer sheen on the rock, even in the flare of the electric lamp it was discernible ; and on a sudden impulse Mr. Latimer switched off the searchlight. Then exclamations of supreme wonderment rushed from four pairs of lips, for Dr. Vyner and Monro had climbed up into the conning-tower, crowding it greatly, but the sight to be witnessed through the observation ports more than made up for any such small discomfort.

The rock was lit up brightly—so that it was possible to observe its every detail. But the light was eerie, unholy; ghost-like in its silvery unreality. It was more like moonlight through thin fog than any other radiance; and the watchers felt a sense of fear creep over them. What could this brightness portend? It was not reflected daylight streaming through some crevasse in the Polar ice, that was certain, for darkest night held sway above them.

"The Aurora shining through a hole," suggested Dr. Vyner.

It might have been that. Perhaps there was a display of that marvellous electrical phenomenon which has aroused the curiosity of scientists for centuries. Perhaps the magnetic currents that cluster round the Pole had joined forces to give a display of such magnitude as defied the very sun itself. For the Aurora Borealis is such a wonderful thing that no man may say to what lengths it may not go. Sometimes, standing up there within the Arctic Circle, with ice ahead and on either side, the explorer may see a vast arc of radiant colouring shoot up into the northern sky. Like a triumphal arch erected for the welcoming of a monarch, this marvel shines with every colour known to man, purple and crimson, yellow and green. Great flames burst from its curves, shoot out in weird zigzags across the dark vault of the midnight sky; spires ascend and descend, the entire world seems to go out in a riot of splendour. For hours this phenomenon

might hold possession of the sky ; ringing in such wonderful changes as to make the stoutest-hearted man feel dismayed at the untold magnificence of the natural forces of the world.

And then, just when the spectacle has attained its utmost splendour, just when the human mind feels incapable of receiving more impressions, the wonder fades as suddenly as it has arisen, leaving behind it a darkness that is doubly dark because of the immediate change from light as bright as summer daylight, to the Stygian blackness of the winter Pole.

"But it can't be the Aurora," said the explorer. "What depth are we, Monro?"

The American lad examined the depth-recorder. "Close on one hundred fathoms, uncle."

The theory of the Aurora was at once squashed flat. It was impossible for the brightest sunlight to penetrate to that depth even if there were a hole in the ice ; therefore the idea of a magnetic display was out of the question.

"It must be phosphorescence on the rocks," suggested Vyner again. "I believe that there is no limit to the marvels of the sea. Myriads of insects, countless, immense, are clustered on the rock, sending out a light from their microscopic bodies in every direction. Yet if we were to examine the water closely we should see nothing whatsoever. I remember once seeing such a phenomenon in the Bay of Bengal. For two days we steamed through a sea that was as white as milk and as radiant as a summer day. Yet

whenever we scooped up the water we saw nothing; it was perfectly clear. The sea has not yet disclosed one per cent. of its marvels, and we as pioneers have discovered a wonder."

"Or it might be something else," said Mr. Latimer. "If we can have a display of magnetism in the air, as shown by the Aurora, why should we not have such a display under water? Magnetism—and every one agrees that the Aurora is a magnetic effect—does not depend on the air for its conducting. It is able to travel through any element; and it seems to me that this unusual sight might very well owe its being to some magnetic force working under water, and being deflected from the rock. In all probability there is some substance in that rock which collects the magnetism and uses it as a carbon rod uses electricity in an arc light. But whatever the cause the effect is most wonderful."

And it was. Look where they would they saw this mysterious exhalation of bright light. It crept out of the face of the rock above the cavity like a stream flowing into the sea. And by its light they were able to make out further marvels; squirming sea-snakes that tried to press their slimy bodies closer against the rock which was their home; vast crabs with as many legs as a centipede; unholy jelly-fish, clinging to the stone by magnified tentacles, whilst reaching out with others to catch unwary swimmers, who darted this way and that to elude capture, but were always caught and drawn into an open,

grinning mouth. The entire sight was so wonderful that for many a long minute the watchers held their breath in awe, afraid even to speak lest their voices should break the magic of the vision, and show them that they were only floating in a darkened sea out of sight of anything more actual than water.

It was Mr. Latimer who was the first to rouse himself. He was an explorer first, last, and all the time, and every minute counted in his mind.

"We'll explore the cavern, if you all agree," he said gently.

Instinctively every eye fixed itself on the mouth of the cave. It seemed to grin at them like some yawning mouth waiting to engulf them once and for all. No man might say what terrors had their abiding place behind that screen of seaweed and magnetic light—perhaps the kraken itself might dwell there—huge, deadly, able to destroy the *Pioneer* and all aboard her by the crush of a single tentacle. But men who have committed their fortunes to a submarine under the Polar ice are not to be deterred by fancied dangers, and it was unanimously agreed to pursue the voyage at once.

"Drop her a few fathoms, Harold," said Mr. Latimer, and the submarine dropped softly down from the upper edge of the cavern's mouth. There was no sign of a floor; evidently the opening reached down to an illimitable depth, perhaps even to the bed of the Arctic. But the weird light still continued brightly, there was no need

of the searchlight for the moment, and they did not switch it on.

"Now, forward," said the explorer. The engines commenced their melodious throb; the *Pioneer* swung with her bow pointing inwards, passed under the screen of weed, and at once was enveloped in the grimmest darkness. On one side of the screen was light equal to radiant moonlight, on the other the blackness of the grave. It was uncanny, alarming, but they had seen so many marvels that they hardly felt a qualm of fear. Monro switched on the searchlight and the submarine crept cautiously forward; all hands, with the exception of Harold, who was now at the engine, peering intently ahead.

They were in a mighty sea cavern—that was evident. Its roof could be seen faintly in the upward sheen of the searchlight; it was hung with huge pillars, through and amongst which floated grim denizens of this secret hiding-place. A shark—the very father of all sharks—floated lazily towards the *Pioneer*, seemed to sniff at it—Monro shivered a little as he saw its evil, cunning eye, and the wide slit of its gaping mouth—decided that it was not eatable, and with a flick of its tail turned and swept back to its hiding-place.

They could see the sides of the cavern now—the place was merely a narrow passage. Everywhere was teeming life, and of such wonderment that Dr. Vyner was kept amazingly busy with his notebook in which he was entering

details as fast as the pencil would travel. He was an accomplished artist, and in a rough fashion the surgeon sketched the most wonderful of the inhabitants of the grotto.

"But these sketches won't be believed," he said. "They'll say I was mad when I drew them. Never mind; I know they're genuine and correct."

"That looks like rock ahead," said Mr. Latimer after half an hour had passed. "Slow down a little more to prevent accident, and we'll creep up quietly."

The *Pioneer* slowed to a mere crawl, and pushed her way an inch at a time through the water. As she went forward it seemed as if that mysterious sheen they had noticed at the cavern's entrance must be present again, for the water began to grow a trifle clouded. To test the evidence Mr. Latimer turned off the searchlight and there was the same great luminosity shining through the depths. Forward went the submarine; it seemed as if she must surely stop. Then her bow was felt to touch a face of solid stone, and Mr. Latimer gave a groan of despair.

"There's no passage this way," he said. "We must turn and go back."

But Monro gave a little cry and pointed forward and downward. "That looks like another cave," he said. "See, uncle, there below that big sucker that's stuck to the rock."

Mr. Latimer looked, and smiled. "Yes, that

looks exceedingly like a cave, my boy. We'll drop down a little more and explore. Who knows but that this may be the very passage we were seeking? I see success before us at last. This must be the connecting passage that leads us through the rock barrier to the open waters of the Pole. Down a little, and forward still."

The *Pioneer* slid down gently, and soon the watchers were peering into darkness. The searchlight revealed another opening similar to the one they had first entered, and as the submarine's bow pushed aside the protecting curtain of weed Mr. Latimer noticed that a vast shoal of fish seemed to be swimming swiftly forward in the direction they were themselves taking. So fast did these finny shoals travel that they outdistanced the *Pioneer* easily—a fact which the explorer was quick to note.

"I take it that this is the last lap of the race from one side of the barrier to the other," he said excitedly. "Courage, my friends! One dash and we may well be through the passage and out at the other side, almost within reach of the Pole."

All four shared his excitement. The sound of the cheer they gave echoed unnaturally in the confined space of the submarine; it dinned back hollowly like a message of awful warning. They took no heed; they were keyed up to such a pitch of exaltation that a volcanic eruption could not have alarmed them then.

"Hullo! that's a queer sight!" cried Vyner, almost before the echoes of the cheer had died away. "Look—see those two sharks? They might be shepherds driving their flocks in front of them. See how they turn and twist and spur on the laggards."

It was a sight full of interest. The shoals of fish that had passed the *Pioneer* were either fleeing hurriedly before the two giant sharks, or they were leading the way to freedom and the seas around the Pole. But it would seem that the sharks were interested in their maintaining a straight course, for whenever the shoals seemed inclined to dally or to break away from the straight line of their progress, one or other of the monsters would make a swift dash forward, and usher the procession into line. It was done with surprising deftness, exactly as a shepherd's dog drives flustered sheep along a narrow road. And the fish were of all kinds and shapes. Big and little, giant halibut, flat plaice, cod, herring, mackerel, every fish the explorers had ever seen, and very many they had never set eyes on before, went to form that truly remarkable procession.

They went on at a slightly quicker speed, following the lead of the sharks, whose tails showed plainly in the searchlight's glare. This new cavern they were exploring was larger than that through which they had already passed; it seemed to bulge out into a huge circle once they were past the narrow corridor that formed

its entrance. At the moment they were too interested to notice the fact; a few moments later they were to thank God fervently for the added breadth.

On they went, gaining confidence with every second that passed. It was evident that there was a passage through the rock, those fish would never be journeying at that speed otherwise. Mr. Latimer was peering through the outlook ports earnestly when he noticed the water grow strangely milky until it was almost opaque.

"Slow; stand by to stop," he commanded. And the *Pioneer* lay almost motionless in the opaqueness for a clear minute. Then the milkiness vanished completely, leaving water that was as clear as crystal. Mr. Latimer took a long, searching look. His face grew as white as death; his eyes seemed literally to shoot from his head. He tried to speak, but no words would pass his dry lips; his tongue seemed to shrivel like a cinder in his throat. He tried to lift a hand; he was unable to move a finger, paralysed by the enormity of what he saw. For the *Pioneer* was heading as surely as arrow to target into the huge gaping mouth of an octopus as big as a battleship. Its great saucer eyes were glittering evilly, and on either side of the vast cavern that was its mouth a large shark seemed to keep watch and ward.

CHAPTER XIII

THE GUARDIAN OF THE CAVERN

"STOP her! Go astern!" To Mr. Latimer's mind his voice was a mere whisper; try as he would he could not make a sound that was likely to carry above the throb of the engine. He made another desperate effort to turn, to thaw the iciness of the horror that held him spell-bound, but it was in vain. It seemed as if the *Pioneer* were doomed. Nay; even as the explorer stared wildly ahead a tentacle shot out—a tentacle like nothing ever seen on earth or in the waters under the earth. At its root close alongside that gaping mouth it was ten feet thick at the least, and it was possible to see the muscles ripple and squirm with violent spasms under the leathery skin. That single tentacle was over a hundred feet long; but it did not shoot straight out. Had it done so the *Pioneer* had ended her voyage then and there, for once in the clutch of that monstrous limb she must have been crushed like an eggshell. But instead of shooting out like an arrow it swung high into the gloom and its upper extremity became lost to sight, though the lower section was plainly outlined in the searchlight's glare. It seemed to hover for a full minute over the

FIRST AT THE POLE

submarine ere descending; in reality it hardly poised for two seconds. Then, by the quivering of the lower muscles it would seem to be falling. The *Pioneer* had not entirely stopped; she was still advancing straight towards that open mouth. It was a moment of such tense horror that the only wonder was Mr. Latimer's reason did not crack under the awful strain. Men have been driven hopelessly insane by causes which were not equal to a one-hundredth part of the terror revealed in the cavern.

It was the giant octopus, the guardian of the cavern; the monster at which men have sneered for ages, though in their inner hearts they have believed that such a vast creation did exist. There it was, stopping all further progress, capable of swallowing the *Pioneer* with a single gulp, able to rend it to tortured fragments by a single squeeze of one of its enormous limbs.

No need now to wonder at the swift progress of that great shoal of fish. They were the monster's meal, ushered to their doom by the cunning sharks, the monster's hunters. No one might guess how long the octopus had been there in its Polar solitudes; perhaps centuries had passed since it had floated to its home, then a tiny inconsiderable thing. It might have remained there until it grew to such a size as to be unable to pass through the narrow opening of the cave, and there have fattened until its dimensions were so mighty as to fill up the entire cave. However that might be, there it was;



the giant octopus, the guardian of the cavern



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and the *Pioneer* seemed fated never to return from her memorable voyage.

"Stop!"

Ah! Mr. Latimer found his voice at last. With an effort that left him spent and gasping he threw off the deadly horror that held him enchained, and lifted his voice in a yell that seemed to freeze Harold's blood in his veins. Overhead could be seen an immense dark curve, slowly bending down towards the submarine—it was the arm of the octopus descending to grasp its prey. With the frenzy of utter despair Mr. Latimer wrenched the wheel round—for Monro was standing like a statue, his hair on end, sweat dripping down his face, his eyes fixed and glassy. He was on the verge of paralysis; he too had seen the guardian of the cavern, and his young heart stopped its beating for an appreciable minute.

"Go ahead, full speed!" roared Mr. Latimer, as the steering wheel jammed hard down. The *Pioneer* began to turn away from that awful mouth; she gathered impetus, and the explorer's courage came back to him with a rush.

"Keep her going; no matter what happens, keep her going!" he thundered. "It's death to stop now, sudden death for all!"

Harold rose to the occasion gallantly. He had seen nothing of the sight outside the observation ports, but he knew from the tone of his father's voice that some terrible emergency had arisen. He reversed the engine for a moment,

as he knew that by so doing he would get her to slue quicker ; and then threw the throttle lever wide open. Instantly the craft pulsed wildly, so wildly indeed that it was almost impossible to hear even a shouting voice. Inch by inch the bow drew away from that awful Thing—but it appeared as if all were to prove too late. For the octopus's arm descended full upon the swinging bow and writhed sinuously around it.

"Don't stop—give her all you can !" yelled Mr. Latimer, the cold sweat running down his face in streams. "She *must* go on ; it's death to stop."

Harold did his best, and there began at once a most terrific tug-of-war. The octopus had enormous strength, but on the polished steel of the *Pioneer's* bow it could not get sufficient grip to enable it to exert that strength to the full, and the sideways pull of the submarine, with all the power of her engines exerted to its utmost was almost equally strong. The one paralysing possibility was that the tentacle might close on the conning-tower ; and if that happened nothing could save them, for the metal superstructure must inevitably be wrenched off like a tin can ; the water would pour into the hull, and death must be the portion of all on board.

Like a man in a trance Mr. Latimer watched the great tentacle slide down the pointed bow, rippling constantly as if seeking for a fresh hold. Once he glanced at the compass and saw the bow was moving slowly away, but so slowly as to be

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almost imperceptible. And he saw something else, something which tightened his chest with new and stronger fear, something that seemed to freeze his blood to ice. Another tentacle was hovering over the conning-tower! It was a time when men either betray enormous cowardice or wonderful courage—there is no intermediate stage. Mr. Latimer rose to the occasion. He set his jaw in a dogged square such as those who knew him understood to mean that he would rather die than submit to defeat. Only one way was open, and that might mean death for all on board. But it was a chance against certain death in a most appalling form, and afforded the faintest possibility of hope. Mr. Latimer, remembering that three lives were in his charge, determined to take the risk. He looked into the hull of the submarine, and saw Dr. Vyner lying like a corpse on the floor; saw Monro's face slowly awakening to horrified consciousness. From neither of these could he expect the slightest help; but Harold had not seen the horror, and could be depended upon.

"Come here!" The voice that issued the command was hoarse and trembling, but it carried to the lad's ears. He gave a last glance at his engine, and then raced towards the conning-tower as fast as he could go; he was bent almost double but he ran like a monkey on all fours.

"Don't dare to look out of those ports. Obey me implicitly. We are in deadly danger, but

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there is just a chance of escape. Can you lower the vessel swiftly? Very well." Harold had answered in the affirmative. "Very well, be ready to do it at my signal. But there is something else first. Open that locker where the dynamite is kept. So; take out a torpedo—not a large one, the smallest you can find. Got it? Very well; carry it to the tube there, forward. Place it in the chamber, and close the breech; have everything ready for instant firing."

Harold did as he was bidden, marvelling the while he did it at the icy coldness of Latimer's voice. He did not know that if his father had for a moment lost his grip of the enormous self-restraint he was exerting, he would drop in a swoon. The lad withdrew a small torpedo, charged with dynamite; it was more in the nature of a bomb than an actual torpedo, and was one of those designed for the purpose of blasting a way through the ice in case of danger. Forward was a small vertical torpedo tube, worked by compressed air, capable of firing the missile directly upwards. Into the breech of this tube Harold slipped his explosive weapon, closed the breech swiftly, and stood waiting. Mr. Latimer was trying to think, to think more quickly than he had ever thought in his life. He well knew the dangers that faced him. Should the torpedo explode before the *Pioneer* had sunk a reasonable depth the submarine must inevitably be shattered. But if he hesitated too long the

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octopus would have the conning-tower wrenched off, and the ice-cold waters of the Polar sea would be rushing into the interior—shutting off all hope of life. It needed the brain of a scientist to compute the exact moment for action. Mr. Latimer knew to the fraction of an ounce the charge of dynamite in the torpedo; knew its bursting force, knew its effect. If he could fire the missile, and drop the *Pioneer* so swiftly as to withdraw it out of range of the discharge all might yet be well. If he miscalculated by so much as the decimal of a second everything was lost.

"All ready," cried Harold breathlessly.

"Get back to the engines, quick! Stop them."

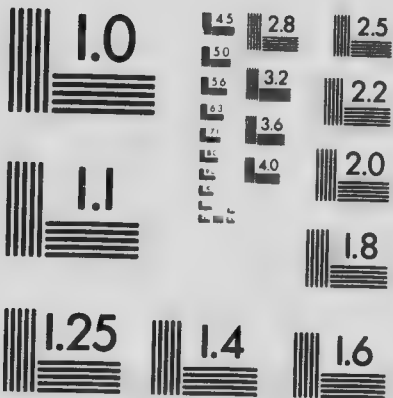
It was done almost as quickly as it takes to tell. Harold gripped the lever and the mad pulsations died away into eerie silence. But the submarine shook and twisted in the grip of the octopus, and though the vacuum between the two walls deadened the sound it was easy to imagine the rasping of the mighty tentacle on the hull.

Mr. Latimer eased up the wheel a trifle, and the bow of the *Pioneer* ceased to draw away from that awful clutch. Instead it swung slowly back towards the gaping mouth, but as if the monster were surprised at the sudden cessation of resistance it made no immediate attempt to tighten its hold. For a while the tentacle hung slackly in great curves, and the second arm had not yet taken its grip.



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"Let her drop!"

It sounded like a clap of thunder, and Harold obeyed like lightning. One twist of his wrist and the frightful force of the compressed air opened the sea-cocks and admitted the water into the ballast tanks; the *Pioneer* fell like a stone downwards. Mr. Latimer held his breath now—failure, miscalculation meant instant death.

"Stand-by to fire the torpedo, Harold!"

Harold dived to the tube, and stood in readiness, every nerve thrilling, his heart beating like a sledge-hammer. Mr. Latimer waited—waited until he reckoned the submarine must be completely under the monster's body. Then he drew in a deep breath and cried "Fire!"

For the moment nothing seemed to happen. There was a slight hiss as the compressed air was turned into the tube; that was all. There was no shock, no quiver, but Mr. Latimer held his breath like a man who is plunging into deep water from a great height.

All suddenly the *Pioneer* rocked wildly, spun about like a teetotum, cocked her stern into the air, and leaped upward. There was no sound of an explosion; the vacuum stopped that, for sound cannot travel where there is no air—but the jerking and pulsing feeling was very pronounced. It was staggering, stunning. Harold fell face downwards on the metal deck, and lay there, unable to move, simply overcome by the shock. But Mr. Latimer knew what depended on

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his presence of mind. He took a rapid run to the engines and started them, jammed his wheel hard down, and then, for the first time since the torpedo was fired, ventured to look through the ports. He had been afraid to venture before.

He saw a vast filthiness all about him; and the huge tentacle still clung to the bow. Tossing and swaying as the submarine was it was almost impossible to maintain foothold in the conning-tower, but by clinging to the wheel he managed to keep his balance. Then as the water cleared a little the explorer made out huge masses of flesh floating past the ports, saw after a short interval the gigantic body of a dead shark drop downwards. It was one of the octopus's huntsmen, and the explosion had killed it instantly.

But what of the octopus itself? The black cloud in the water had cleared away a little, but so little that beyond a radius of twenty feet or so it was impossible to see. The tentacle on the bow was quivering still, it seemed as if the great explosion had not entirely killed the guardian of the cavern. But it had undoubtedly weakened it, for as the engines continued to throb, the bow swept round more and more. And so far as Mr. Latimer could tell nothing had happened to the *Pioneer*. The dynamite had expended the most of its force upwards, against the point of greatest resistance, which point in this case must have been some portion of the octopus's body.

Just as the explorer saw that the submarine

was practically intact, Harold roused himself, and rose to his feet, looking dazed and in pain. The uneasy motion was subsiding slowly; the worst was over. All that mattered now was whether the octopus were killed or merely stunned; and Mr. Latimer hardly dared hope that the former might have happened. But there was no time for further thought—at all costs the vessel must be extricated from that cave of horrors, and taken away to the clear waters of the open sea.

"Open out the engines, Harold."

"Yes, pater."

The lad stumbled towards his charge, and though he was still half insensible, old habits came to his assistance, and he tended the engine automatically. The *Pioneer* thrilled and shook as if in monstrous anguish; but it was plain that the resistance of the gigantic tentacle was lessening. Indeed, as Mr. Latimer watched, he saw the limb slowly slide away from its hold, as if reluctant even in death to lose the prize it had seized. Then the thing vanished from sight; the submarine swung clean round, and headed for the entrance to the cave.

Mr. Latimer, as has been seen, was a brave man. But he was not altogether a foolhardy one, and there is as much difference between bravery and foolhardiness as there is between day and night. He had no idea of penetrating still further into the recesses of this mysterious cavern, and of trying to reach the Polar seas

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by that route. He was able to recognise defeat when he saw it. It was quite evidently fore-ordained that he should not reach his goal under the sea—everything pointed to that conclusion. It would be the height of recklessness to take the *Pioneer* further North, for it was extremely likely that she would have suffered some material damage from her experience; which though it might not show at the moment, would inevitably land them in such a predicament as no man might think of and remain cool. No; it was absolutely necessary to get back to the *Enterprise* and make fresh arrangements. The explorer took this alarming occurrence as a warning not to try further to penetrate the hidden mysteries of the cavern. It was unlikely that another such passage would exist; if it did, it was possible that some fiendish thing, even more appalling than the octopus, would be found lurking there in the darkness of the remoter deeps.

"No; the next attempt must be made over the ice; I've done enough under it," he muttered to himself. "Harold." He raised his voice to a shout.

"Yes, pater." The reply was weak and quavering, but Harold, despite the aching of his temple, where in his fall he had struck the metal deck sharply, was alert, ready for anything.

"Lift her, lad—look alive. Thank God this filthy blackness is clearing!"

The density was undoubtedly thinning; it

was possible now to see a considerable distance ahead and above. The *Pioneer* was slowly settling into even motion; Harold drove out the ballast, and the vessel leaped upwards with a jerk that almost shook the two off their feet. Then Mr. Latimer steadied her on her course, making straight for the direction where he considered the mouth of the inner cave lay.

Once the head of the ship was held unwaveringly on the point of the compass which meant safety, the explorer gave a sharp look astern, and another cry left his whitened lips. No wonder he cried out. Through the thinning gloom a sinuous arm was shooting forth, hovering over the *Pioneer's* stern! Almost as he realised that the octopus was in pursuit there came a great blow from behind, the *Pioneer* shook throughout her length, dipped heavily aft, steadied again.

"Faster, Harold!" It came from Mr. Latimer's lips in a despairing shriek. He knew that danger of the most fearful kind was in pursuit. Impossible now to turn to bring the fore torpedo tube to bear; impossible to do anything save drive ahead blindly, trusting in the submarine's superior speed to pull her through. The *Pioneer* had not yet got fully under weigh; she had been turned and stopped so much that it might require a considerable time to effect full speed. But Harold was at the engines, kneeling beside them, coaxing them skilfully, doing all he knew. The ship seemed about to burst apart with

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the terrific vibration ; she creaked and groaned protestingly.

There came a shivering jar that seemed to lift the engines from their bed ; they stopped, but as Harold, with the fierce courage of despair, threw himself upon the starting handle, and jerked it with might and main, they resumed their explosive beat, though now the beat was irregular and uncertain.

Mr. Latimer glanced through the after ports. Owing to the searchlight streaming forward it was next to impossible to make out details with any clearness, but he fancied he saw a writhing tentacle hovering near. But it was withdrawn swiftly ; it writhed and contorted so grotesquely that the explorer thought something awful must have happened to it. He had no time for conjectures now, however. They were nearing the entrance to the cave—it was there, right ahead, plainly revealed in the searchlight's glare. Mr. Latimer found himself breathing incoherent prayers of thankfulness for the forethought that had led him to fix the searchlight actually in the submarine's bow instead of in a separate attachment, for otherwise the octopus must inevitably have torn it off as a man might uproot a weed.

The beat of the engines grew more uneven, the shaft gyrated awkwardly. What had happened ? None might tell ; none had time to think. It was necessary to concentrate every energy on negotiating the narrow passage, as until the *Pioneer* was safely outside the cavern

she was still in deadly danger. Through the narrows the octopus could not pass. Mr. Latimer called on his nerve, and steered with exquisite precision; once, as the *Pioneer's* bows shot between the narrowing walls of rock, he looked back, but nothing was to be seen except that queer brightness. Then, with a rush and a heave the submarine was through.

"Don't let her slow down, my boy," roared the explorer loudly. "She must be kept going."

Harold proved himself worthy of the trust reposed in him. For a long time now he coaxed the engines, though the ominous rattling was growing louder and more frequent. It seemed as if some appalling shock had wrenched the working parts asunder, that any minute might witness the climax of a dread catastrophe. The engines were sounding a shrill alarm, and there lay still many, many miles between those in the submarine and safety.

Through the outer cavern the *Pioneer* sped, though the ringing of the speed indicator became less frequent every minute. The craft was losing her speed; she was slowing down to a mere crawl. The slimy walls of rock on either side seemed almost to stand still, not to flash past as they had done before. Mr. Latimer wiped away the sweat that would persist in dripping into his eyes, set his jaw again, and vowed solemnly that if a human being could bring victory from what looked like inevitable defeat, he would be the man.

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Ten minutes more: they seemed like ten hours. Fifteen minutes more: it was like waiting for the fall of the executioner's axe. Then—a sensation of marvellous relief: a feeling of unspeakable thankfulness—the *Pioneer* had passed through the entrance to the outer cave and was in deep water again.

"Can you keep her going, Harold? I must have speed. Get her going evenly, and then come and take the wheel. I must attend to these others."

"She's working badly, pater. I don't know what's wrong: everything seems to be broken up."

He left the engines, and made his way to the conning-tower, took the wheel, and allowed his father to vote himself to the unconscious pair. Presently Dr. Vyner opened his eyes and stared blankly around him, emitted a piercing shriek, and fainted away again. It seemed that the impression of what he had seen must still be in his brain; and it was the same with Monro, when he came to his senses. He laughed feebly, looked upwards, fell back with a cry, and flung trembling hands over his ashen face.

Mr. Latimer persevered, and little by little the two were brought round. No one spoke of the horror that had been seen. Dr. Vyner and Monro were silent because they dare not let their minds rest on the octopus; Mr. Latimer because he had something else to think of. He had taken the wheel from Harold again, and

had sent him to the engines, which were giving indications of alarming portent. The explorer calculated that they had put something like twenty miles between the entrance to the outer cave and themselves by this time; for it had taken several hours to restore the surgeon and Monro to complete sensibility, and he knew the time that must elapse before they could hope to reach the *Enterprise*.

And just as he had tasted the bitterness of real despair for the third time that day the engines gave a sickening shriek, a chattering grind, and stopped dead.

"I can't do anything with them," cried Harold despairingly, working hard whilst he spoke. "Something's gone wrong: they won't move!"

CHAPTER XIV.

A GREAT DANGER AND A GREATER SURPRISE.

THEY faced their awful situation bravely, for they were of the Anglo-Saxon race, men who fought hardest when defeat seemed nearest. And yet there was so little to be done. They were helpless beneath the sea and the ice; the most they could hope to do was to blow a way to safety through the frozen covering, and then attempt to tramp back across the weary miles that lay between themselves and the ship. And it was winter—an Arctic winter, when there was no light to guide. They had no sledges. All the food they could carry on their backs would not last them a week. But there was nothing for it, apparently: they must risk that forlorn hope and take their lives in their hands.

But not yet. There might be a chance of repairing the damaged engine. They all understood sufficient of petrol machinery to make them able to cope with ordinary disasters; so, at once, without pausing to make unnecessary remarks, without pausing for food, which they all needed badly, they set to work. The *Pioneer* floated serenely at a fair depth below the ice: there was no immediate danger of her sinking.

If the compressed air only held out long enough there was a good chance of doing something with the craft.

But when Mr. Latimer made a covert examination of the air tanks he felt fear strike at his heart. There was barely sufficient air to last them twenty hours, and at the best they could do it would take them a clear two days to return to the ship. Still, he said nothing to his companions, for he had no wish that they should taste the same despair that was rapidly undermining his bravery. He had done a dozen times more than any man on board; now he was feeling the strain. Hopelessness was beginning to prey on his mind. Had he allowed himself to pause and reflect, he must assuredly have dropped in a swoon that was twin sister to death there and then; but he would not allow himself to collapse. He knew that the lives of his companions depended on his skill and courage, and he rose superior to circumstances.

"Get the engine overhauled," was his first command.

Harold was already stripping it. Piece by piece it came away. It was a wonderful exhibition of coolness. They might have been motorists broken down at a roadside for all the evidence to the contrary. But instead of being beside a well-travelled road, within easy reach of assistance, death seemed to face them in every direction. Two of them had but newly recovered from a shock that had almost killed them;

one of them had faced a death so hideous as not to bear contemplation, and had been compelled to fight a mighty battle whilst his soul sickened with horror. Only Harold as yet had no idea of what the danger had been ; and despite this they all worked well, because they were brave men — men who refused to consider obstacles.

Close examination of the engine disclosed a lamentable state of affairs. The entire construction was disorganised. One of the pistons was jammed so firmly in the cylinder that nothing they could do would start it. It appeared that the blow that had jerked the *Pioneer* forward had caused the shaft to stop for a moment, whilst the engines still went on, with the result that bearings were twisted into contorted shapes, and everything movable was jammed hard and fast. The only wonder was that the engines had run so long as they had done after the accident. But Harold knew that the mix-up was the result of that frenzied driving after the shock. Had the submarine been allowed to stop at once the damage probably would not have been one-half so extensive as it was ; but she had not been allowed to rest, and there they were, face to face with a problem that would have daunted a skilled engineer in a well-fitted machine shop.

They worked on, though. Little by little they got some parts clear, but the more they did the more appalling was the damage revealed. It

was an absolute impossibility to do anything. They smote hard at the jammed piston with hammers; it would not move. It had been kicked sideways a little at the commencement; the furious driving had driven it more sideways, until now it had cut a way for itself in the wall of the cylinder, and had at last jammed fast in a natural prison.

They toiled like beavers, sweating at every pore; and if the work was useless as far as the engines were concerned, it did them good, for it prevented them from brooding over what had passed. Until, after a lapse of some three hours, Harold threw down his hammer, wiped his forehead, and said:

"It's no use going on. We couldn't make those engines work if we stopped here till next Christmas but one."

Mr. Latimer reflected. Should he keep his secret to himself? Should he allow them to labour on in ignorance of the fact that air for a bare seventeen hours remained? No; they were heroes all; they could stand to hear anything he might have to tell them.

"We must get out somehow or other," he said. "We shall die of suffocation if we don't."

Then he explained to them what had happened to the air-tanks. "I'm afraid we used it too lavishly at the first. Either that, or I computed the amount we should require wrongly. Yet I was so confident that we should find open water where we could refill our tanks, that I did not

trouble unduly over the matter. Now, however, we are face to face with a serious problem. We have air enough for seventeen hours. We are in a vessel that is useless. We are, I reckon, two hundred miles and more away from our ship. What is to be done?"

"Try again," said Harold pluckily, and Monro echoed his words. "Let's have another shot at this jolly old engine and do the best we can."

But Dr. Vyner knew that they were incapable of doing anything that would be of service. "I think there is only one thing to be done, Latimer," he observed shakily, for he was still suffering from the effects of the shock, "and that is to try and force our way through the ice by explosives. Then, when we are once more breathing the fresh air of heaven, we might be able to make up our minds to some new course of action. But we owe it to these lads here to do our utmost. I am not afraid of death—I have been too near it lately to fear it unduly—but we owe these lads their lives, even at the cost of our own."

"Then we will do our best. We will endeavour to blow a way to freedom and life," said Mr. Latimer.

Whilst he and the surgeon were discussing matters thus, Harold was receiving a shaky, half-intelligible account of the octopus from Monro.

"I thought it was just about to swallow us entire," said the American lad. "Gee! I've never seen such a mouth. It was as big as a

tunnel—bigger than most. And I could see right down its throat. Ugh! And its eyes! They were greedy and evil. I gave myself up for dead that time, I guess, and I don't want to stand nearer eternity than I did then. I kind of felt everything melt inside me, and next it all froze up again, and I don't remember anything more until Uncle Harry roused me up. Guess I'm no great shucks after all. Anything alive and real I don't mind: but a thing like that, looking dead and horrible—that settled me."

They went about their new preparations methodically, once it was decided that their only hope was to blow a way to the upper air. They carefully padded all the torpedoes but one, which they left out, in case the jar should explode the remaining explosives and thus end the matter once and for all. There had been no time for such a precaution when they fired at the octopus; but, as Mr. Latimer said: "We've time to take care now, and we'll do it." Then the torpedo selected had to be fixed so that it would not explode prematurely. They tested the batteries, and found there was more than sufficient electricity to enable them to fire a charge, though the power was almost exhausted and the searchlight was now burning dimly. They attached a wire to the explosive charge—one that would enable the submarine to descend to a great depth before firing; they removed the percussion head, and at last all was in readi-

ness. They felt that this was their last hope, but they contrived to joke amongst themselves as the work progressed.

"If any rival explorers happen along when we fire the charge it will surprise them some," said Monro. "Guess they'll think they've struck the father and mother of all earthquakes, and they'll go back to tell all the world that they've hit on a surprising phenomenon."

"They'll call it a sub-ice volcano," said Harold. "But won't they feel awkward if we explode the torpedo right under their feet? They won't need any airships this journey: they'll never stop travelling until they reach the Pole."

It was poor fun, but it was a brave attempt to keep up the spirits of the party.

Presently all was in readiness. It must be remembered that although the engines of the *Pioneer* were damaged she was still capable of rising and falling through the water. They ejected the ballast sufficiently to cause the craft to rise, and when the depth-recorder rang loudly they calculated that they were near the ice. Then the torpedo was discharged upwards, but because they required time to elapse before firing, they had fixed an air-filled canister to its rear to allow it to float against the ice. Otherwise it would have sunk like a stone, and would probably have blown them to bits instead of the ice. They used only a small force of compressed air, merely enough to drive the torpedo

from the tube; and when they calculated that it had reached its destination they dropped swiftly downwards, Monro paying out the connecting wire. A little water percolated through the breech of the torpedo tube, but it was nothing to cause alarm.

"Now give her the current," said Mr. Latimer, and Harold pressed the switch. The *Pioneer* rocked wildly for a moment, the water boiled about her observation ports, then she was still. They forced out the ballast, using some of their valuable compressed air for the purpose, and rose as swiftly as they had descended. Loose chunks of ice scrubbed the submarine's top; but though they turned the waning searchlight everywhere they saw no signs of such an opening as they had expected. They were so placed that it was impossible to look straight upwards: they could only look in a slanting direction, and nowhere was any sign of such damage as they had looked to find.

It was almost with a groan that Mr. Latimer gave orders to repeat the experiment, using this time two torpedoes instead of one. The operation was conducted as before, with the same result. Nothing happened. Invariably as they rose after firing the depth-recorder rang warningly to tell them that thick ice was above them. They used eight torpedoes before they desisted but at length Mr. Latimer judged it best to pause awhile and reconsider the alarming situation.

"Evidently the ice is too thick for us to hope to blast a way through," he said as calmly as he could. "And it does not seem likely that we can alter our position so as to come under thinner ice. There is always the possibility, too, that we are under a shelf of rock, and in that case we might blast for ages without coming through to the surface. Now, what remains? A remote chance of repairing the engine and continuing on our way back to the ship. That is about all. If we could only repair the machinery enough to take us along a mile we could try the explosives again, although we have only three torpedoes remaining."

His words fell like the knell of death on his hearers' understanding. They had tried every resource; they must now admit defeat.

"We might manage to get her along by means of the hand-gear," suggested Harold desperately. "We could send her a mile or two by means of hard work."

"That's a good suggestion, my boy," said Mr. Latimer, with a new brightness in his eye. "It deserves to succeed even if it fails."

Like almost every other engined vessel, the *Pioneer* was fitted with an apparatus for turning the screw by hand, in order that parts of the shaft might be brought into view for careful examination. This apparatus was intended to move the engines actually; but it was found possible so to disconnect the machinery that the shaft would revolve without much difficulty

whilst the engine remained motionless. Immediately the four took their places at the crank, and after a hard struggle the shaft began to turn slowly, gathering speed as the wearied muscles of the party supplied to the new work. But it was slow toil at the best. The normal revolutions of the shaft, when the submarine was going at eight knots per hour, were somewhere about one hundred and ten per minute. The most the explorers could do was to revolve the shaft sixty times per minute, and that required stupendous effort, which could not be continued for long. But it had results. The submarine began to crawl forward; the speed bell rang once, then rang again: they had gone half a mile. Mr. Latimer went into the conning tower, and turned the searchlight upwards: nothing but thick, impenetrable ice met his gaze. He descended and fell on the crank like a maniac, and his wild shouts and furious endeavours excited the zeal of his companions, so that they, too, worked like Trojans, refusing to accept defeat even at this critical pass. For close on a quarter of an hour they toiled steadfastly, and then, worn out and aching in every muscle, they paused for rest.

"See if you can detect any signs of improvement," said Mr. Latimer to his son.

Harold dragged himself wearily to the conning-tower and peered out. There was something strange in the outlook, something bewildering. For a moment he could not understand; then

he pressed the switch that actuated the searchlight. Nothing happened ; the sea without was enveloped in darkness most complete. The searchlight was out, and the accumulators were exhausted !

He shouted out the evil news, and the crew of the submarine looked at each other with wan faces. The small incandescent lamps were fed from a storage battery, but they too were burning dimly. They had oil lamps and oil ; but those would consume the air so swiftly as to be less than worth while to light. Mr. Latimer walked along to the conning-tower, and was just about to haul himself up, when Harold gave a croaking cry.

"There's a light streaming through ahead," he said, and pointed with a trembling finger.

"Light ! It's impossible !" ejaculated his father. "Even if there were an opening in the ice, what light could there be ? You are mistaken, my boy ; there can't be any light here."

But Harold still pointed defiantly. "I'm sure it is a light," he sobbed. "Look, pater ; look there. It can't be anything else."

Mr. Latimer knew that it was possible for it to be a phosphorescent sheen in the water, visible now because of the darkness all about. When they had passed that way before the electric headlight had been burning bravely, so they would not have detected the luminosity. But the longer the explorer looked the more convinced he became that Harold had spoken the truth. It

was light—whether natural or artificial remained to be proved.

"It could be a crevasse, and the Aurora might be showing," he said. "We owe it to ourselves to make sure."

Without another word he applied himself to the crank, beckoning the others to add their weight. Harold kept in the conning-tower, watching breathlessly, conscious, now that relief seemed so near, of a great and growing weakness. But though his body was weak his heart was strong and his eyes were keen, and he directed the *Pioneer* steadfastly towards that queer sheen which stood to them all for life and hope. Little by little the small vessel crept forward, and as it went the brightness grew greater. Soon it was close ahead, so close as to bathe the bow of the *Pioneer* in its refulgence. Harold waited until the fore-part was completely under the light, and then :

"Way enough," he cried. "It's time to raise her."

They crowded into the conning-tower, they rejoiced together in that light; they said that death was powerless to turn them from their object. And then they forced the last of the ballast from the tanks and waited—waited.

Would the bell ring? Would the signal tell them that this light was another submarine phenomenon, the creation of their overtried brains? They waited, and their very hearts seemed to stop beating. They dared not look

in one another's faces ; but hand shot out to grip trembling hand, and their eyes shone bright.

"We're on the surface," said Harold all suddenly, and when they looked again from the observation ports they saw beneath their eyes the surface of the sea ; around them was a vast wall of ice, more than a dozen feet in height.

"Off with that hatch ; let's get a breath of God's air," cried Dr. Vyner weakly.

They threw back the powerful bolts and lifted the steel lid ; they shivered as the keen air struck their skins and forced its chill through their scanty clothing. But what of that ? Out of death had come life ; out of suffering ease. They were saved. No one stayed to think that this was but a postponement of the evil and inevitable. No one thought of the long tramp over the ice. They were on the surface, away from the attacks of mighty sea monsters, able to breathe the pure air of heaven, and they clambered up the ladder that led to the deck like men newly lifted from the grave.

"We must see where we are," said Mr. Latimer—and looked up. Then he gave a queer little cry, a mixture of wonder and shame. For on a pole some ten feet from the edge of the hole was burning a brilliant arc lamp, whilst overhead the stars twinkled bravely.

"*Our* pole ; *our* electric light," cried Dr. Vyner, understanding. "We must have been moving in a circle and come back to the *Enterprise*."

He shouted loudly, and his voice rang hollowly in that icy pit in which they lay. Again he shouted; there was no reply. "Shout together, boys," he sobbed, and the two boys added their clamour to his. Presently there was an answering cry; a fur-clad figure appeared at the edge of the ice-dock, and Captain Labby shouted down.

"Back already?" he asked. "Have you found the Pole?"

"No," said Dr. Vyner, whilst Mr. Latimer hung his head. "But we've saved our lives and that's something to be thankful for these hard times."

"Wait a minute and I'll get you a ladder," yelled Captain Labby. "We thought there was a submarine volcano at work an hour or two ago, but we didn't like to explore, fearing something might happen to the ship."

He hurried away and soon returned with men and ropes, with which latter the crew of the submarine were hauled up. Then, arrived on the surface of the ice, the four looked about them as if they had stepped from another world. Very little change was to be seen. There, within a few feet of the ice-dock, was the *Enterprise*, her masts housed and her yards down. Covered with snow as she was, she hardly differed from the giant hummocks to be seen everywhere around her.

"I'll get the ice cut away alongside the ship," said Captain Labby, as they crossed the white

waste. "We must get the *Pioneer* aboard at once. What has happened, sir?"

"I'll tell you when we get on board," said Mr. Latimer wearily.

The awful strain of the past was telling on the intrepid man now; he could hardly hold himself upright; indeed, he stumbled once, and but for the support of Captain Labby's arm would have fallen prone on the ice. He had failed, and the debt remained to be paid. He forgot for the moment that he had the material on board for another dash to the Pole; he forgot everything save that his scheme was proved futile, and so, until the party were safely ensconced in the *Enterprise's* warm cabin, he did not open his mouth again.

"I think I understand the reason," he said, a few hours later, when he had bathed and eaten. "The magnetism up about here is the most erratic force man can have to contend with; and we probably frustrated our own intentions by letting a vacuum exist between the two skins of the *Pioneer's* hull. The compass has pointed any way; it has never pointed surely. We seem to have gone round in circles, and that barrier of rock cannot be more than a few miles away from the ship. Probably we went past it within a mile on our outward journey, and came round it afterwards so that we thought it a new discovery. What does it matter?—we have failed."

"But we have the ability and strength to

try again," said Dr. Vyner, laying a friendly hand on Latimer's shoulder. "Cheer up, old chap, we still have the dogs."

"Yes, we have the dogs," said the explorer wearily. "But we cannot do anything now until the daylight comes."

CHAPTER XV

POISON !

THE night after the *Pioneer's* return Mr. Latimer was down with fever, raving deliriously about gigantic octopuses and vast banks of ice that shut him off from the upper world. Dr. Vyner, shaken and weak, rose superior to himself, and tended his friend with the solicitude and care of a Roman. He seemed to be given new strength for the occasion; he seldom slept; he ate his meals standing, and was always ready to bend over the cot and soothe the sufferer's hot forehead. The awful experience through which he had passed had sapped away Mr. Latimer's strength as surely as if his arteries had been drained dry; he seemed to have no disposition to get well, he cried always that he had failed in his quest and was a ruined man.

Days passed, and there was but little change in the patient's condition. The two lads, with the springiness of youth, had thrown off the evil effects of their adventure; they were as fit and well as ever they had been, and now that the worst was over, were quite ready to start off on another spurt whenever the explorer was once more ready to lead them Northward Ho! There was very little to do in the meantime.

The *Pioneer* was lifted from the water and housed under the shelter of the great shed on the *Enterprise's* deck; and the chief engineer made a careful inspection of the shattered engines. With him the two lads surveyed everything, from the propeller to the searchlight. The former was bent and twisted as to the blades, and the tail-shaft was a little sprung; whilst when they drew out the shaft it was found to be bent half-round on itself. If it had gone another quarter-turn it must have snapped like a carrot.

"Losh! it fair licks me hollow," said the chief, scratching his head. "There never was such a strain put on metal before, outside a hydraulic press. I don't understand it." But when he heard all about that awful vision of the under-seas, he seemed to understand more.

"Ay, your father said there was an arm creepin' after him, eh? Likely there's fearsome things under the sea. I judge the octopus was unco' unwilling to let its prey escape it, and it made a grab at the boatie's stern. It caught the propeller as likely as not, and here ye have the result. But what a grip! Losh, mon, what a grip!"

That was the only explanation possible. Evidently the sea-monster had taken hold of the propeller and had hung on as long as it could, despite the fearful hacking to which it must have been subjected. The more the boys saw of the work done by the octopus the more

they marvelled at the miracle that had enabled them to escape at all.

The chief engineer was very thoughtful as he regarded the engine itself.

"It's fit for naught," he said mournfully. "Mon, yon's an awful upheaval. As bonny a wee engine as ever was, just distorted and fractured and rendered useless. Fit for the scrap heap alone. Gin Mr. Latimer thinks of trying his luck in deep waters again, he'll need a new engine, a new shaft, and a new propeller—naething less will suit." After pronouncing the case hopeless he at once took off his coat and strove to remedy matters, after the fashion of Scotch engineers the world over. The boys worked with him, because there was little else to do. To be sure they mixed with the crew and joined in their rough sports; many a game of "Sling the Monkey" they played on deck, suspended in the bight of a rope from the fore-and-aft piece of the deck-shed, armed with a knotted towel, and defying any one of the laughing sailors to come within reach of their trusty weapons. They ran races along the smoother ice near the ship; they busied themselves in a hundred fashions lest the appalling silence and solitude of the Arctic should render them melancholy and careless of existence.

To the efforts of the lads alone was the good feeling on board the *Enterprise* due. They realised that with the chief of the expedition down, much devolved upon them, and right well they

did their duty. They had made no promise to the sick man, but they knew that the ultimate success of the venture depended largely on the crew being kept cheerful and happy; they racked their brains to devise sports that should keep the men's attention from discontent and treason.

More than that, they familiarised themselves with the Laplanders and the Eskimos. They had already made pets of the vast colony of dogs on board. These sagacious brutes would play with them and be as frolicsome as ladies' lap-dogs; but apart from their own caretakers and the lads anyone else entered their kennels at risk of their lives.

Word by word Harold and Monroe picked up tags of the Eskimo dialect, but found it uncommonly difficult in the learning. Still, it gave them something to do; it kept their brains from idleness, and shut out all possibility of mischief.

In between whiles, in company of Nagathchook, the chief of the Eskimos, they organised hunting expeditions over the frozen wastes, and much fresh meat was added to the *Enterprise's* stores as a result of their labours. But it was only when the brilliant Aurora Borealis suffused the sky with its gorgeous colouring that such expeditions were possible. Now that winter was thoroughly settled down, however, the Aurora seemed disposed to give them all the aid in its power. Once, for three whole periods of twenty-

four hours without a break, the sky was bright with darting flames, during which time the lads and Captain Labby, helped by the chief engineer and the carpenter, made a bag of game that astonished all who saw it. Reindeer, elk, bear, and seal, to say nothing of a gigantic walrus, which fell to a snap-shot of Monroe's just as it was about to enter its air-hole—these formed some part of their bag.

Their adventures during this time of waiting were many and varied. There was one occasion when Monroe was gripped firmly in the embrace of a Polar bear, fortunately for the lad a young one, not much past the cub stage. Monroe had dropped his rifle after pounding the brute over the nose, and when the great paws closed about him he counted himself lost. No one was near; the others had scattered wildly after a herd of reindeer they had sighted an hour before; on his own prowess alone depended the lad's bare life.

Fortunately he had in his belt his large bowie knife, and by dint of a fierce struggle he managed to draw the weapon from its sheath. The bear was slowly overcoming his resistance; he felt his ribs cracking under that monstrous embrace. With all the remnants of his strength to aid him, he thrust the keen weapon deeply into the hairy breast against which his face was crushed. He was blinded and choked by the rush of blood that followed; but he withdrew the blade and plunged it in again and again with mad courage,

twisting and turning the steel as it sank into the flesh, until slowly the grip relaxed, Bruin rolled over, and lay quite still, with its heart cut to shreds.

There was another occasion when Harold fell into a water-hole, and was pulled out by the carpenter only just in time to save his legs from the teeth of a ravenous shark that seemed to spring from nowhere. So disappointed was master shark at his lost meal that he attempted to follow the lad to his place of safety, leaping half out of water on to the ice, where a quickly-fired bullet put a stop to his hunger for ever. But these were only incidents in the time of waiting, hardly worth considering in the light of what had already been endured.

A month went by in this manner, and Christmas came. You may be sure they held a royal Christmas that year, dining off bear-steaks and plum-pudding: the former shot almost alongside the ship, and the latter brought from home, for Mr. Latimer believed in keeping his men well fed and contented. So far, the health of the crew had been good, but, with Christmas past, a sort of lassitude seemed to settle down on the ship. The men were overawed by the magnitude of their surroundings, and though they were kept constantly supplied with lime-juice and vinegar, with preserved fruit and fresh potatoes, three of them went down with scurvy before January was over. Dr. Vyner soon had his hands full. Mr. Latimer was on the fair

road to complete health by this, for, after the stunning shock of the escape, had come a fresh fund of ambition and hope to spur him on to perfect health and fresh endeavour.

These were the days when men scowled back at one another if a single word were spoken ; when more than once hardy sailors would grasp their knife hafts and roll out evil threats against men with whom they had been shipmates for years. There was but little to be done. Captain Labby took counsel of his mate and the chief engineer, and came to the conclusion that all they could hope to accomplish was to sustain the health of the men. Once that was assured better spirits must follow as a matter of course, and to carry out the intention sports were organised, with prizes for the successful competitors. Arctic sports have been described before ; there is no room for such a description here, for more thrilling matters now require our attention. The main incident of the sports was when Chips won the obstacle race by a short neck, snatching the prize away from the second mate, who had led to the last cask. There were five casks in a row, and through these the competitors, dressed in furs for the most part, had to wriggle as best they could. But for the lucky accident of a nail catching the clothing of the second mate he must have won easily ; but the nail was there, and it held famously—so famously, indeed, that Chips was able to run the requisite twenty yards that he had lagged behind, creep through his

barrel, and get under way again before Mr. Slazenby could extricate himself. As the prize was a handsome rifle, which Chips—who was a dead shot—had coveted ever since he saw it, the carpenter was highly elated at his victory.

But the day after the sports Monro, happening along to the kennels as was his usual custom, noticed that Chips was wearing a magnificent black eye. Black eyes were no unusual sight aboard the *Enterprise*, alas! in those troublous days; but Chips was essentially a peace-loving man, and the novelty of the thing attracted Monro's attention.

"It was yon sharger o' a second mate," grunted the carpenter. "Mon, he's an unco' chiel. He wanted that rifle badly, he did; an' because I won he accused me o' drivin' yon nailie intae the cask, o' purpose tae stop him. I up an' telt him I didna ken which cask he'd use, but bless ye, he wouldna listen tae reason. So I e'en telt him he was a leear, and he gied me this wee memento." And he pointed to his discoloured eye.

Monro expressed his indignation, and by this time Harold had joined him.

"I doot there's mair ahint this than meets the eye," said Chips softly, casting a penetrating glance around. "Ay, even a black eye, laddies. Yon second mate kens fine I dinna trust him ower much. I've seen things an' I've heerd things, an' I ken a blackguard as weel's I ken a faulty piece o' teakwood. He knows I'm

watchin' him close, an' he's feared tae do what he intends ; but some day he'll be too clever for me, an' then—weel, I'll no blat aboot it like a bromleykite. But a worrd in yer ears, laddies. There's an ill feeling aboard ; it's no' natural. It wadna be here at a', gin yon second mate was no' here either. Marrk ma worrds ; he's at the bottom o't, an' it'll no' stop at dissatisfied sailors neither."

After expressing himself in this mysterious fashion, Chips refused to speak another word on the subject. But the two lads noticed from that day that the second mate never passed the mainmast going forward but Chips was hovering somewhere near in the background, apparently engaged on some piece of work which occupied his entire attention—in reality keeping a constant watch on the officer's slightest movement.

But the second mate did nothing that would have aroused suspicion, and though Chips believed that he was at the bottom of the unrest shown by the men, he had nothing more than hints and suggestions to prove his case, so that no good could be gained by speaking out to Mr. Latimer or Captain Labby. But there were some good men amongst the *Enierprise's* crew—men who refused to be party to any disloyalty whatsoever ; and these men contrived to keep the others in good order, so that Mr. Slazenby found his intention of causing a mutiny frustrated. The men he persuaded were too few

to hope to carry their point, and the wily traitor cast about for some other means of stopping the final expedition to the Pole.

It was less than a week before the sun showed above the southern horizon that he made his first movement in fulfilment of his horrible scheme. The man was at heart a criminal; he loved wickedness for its own sake; Sir Spencer Fitzgerald could not have found a better tool for his purpose. Slazenby thought out the matter in all its bearings. It was necessary for him to stop the expedition in some way or other; and as he thought, he had a gleam of light.

Dr. Vyner was called in the night to attend one of the scurvy-smitten men who had grown worse. The sufferer was an old sailor, a whaler, a man who had suffered endless privations, which had so weakened him that he could not withstand the attack of the dread scourge. The surgeon was sleepy as he threw a thick fur coat over his pyjamas, and slipped out of his warm cabin. Therefore he did not notice a lurking shape in the shadows of the alley-way. He went straight to his surgery and secured his medicines, left the apartment with the door unlocked, and made his way along the ill-lit deck to the men's room. There he found the sick man not so bad as he had expected.

"I wasn't for rousing you out, sir," said the sailor apologetically, "but Freeman here suggested that I'd better."

Freeman was one of the discontented men ; it was rather unusual for him to be so thoughtful for one who did not side with him. Dr. Vyner, now thoroughly awake, laughed at the man's apologies.

"I'm always ready to fight pain," he said cheerfully. "That's my job. Now, take this, and take another dose in an hour, and I'll warrant you're feeling better by morning. You need a sight of the sun as much as anything, and you'll have it in a day or two, if the skipper's correct, as he's bound to be."

Presently he left the forecastle, with a cheery word to all hands. He went back to the surgery to replace the extra medicines he had taken in the event of serious collapse, and as he entered the room he fancied that one of the bottles in the row nearest the port-hole had been shifted. He put it back without much thought.

"Mustn't let that bottle get out of place," he said sleepily, for now the work was done he felt his eyelids drooping heavily. "The poison bottles are behind there, and we might make a mistake. I wonder how I came to shift that bottle? I must have struck it with my elbow when I was reaching up." And he thought no more of the matter.

Next day, as Monro and Harold were paying their morning visit to the kennels, Nagathchook approached them and gave a rough salute.

"The dogs," he said haltingly, using the poor fragments of English that he had picked

up in his travels, "they seem—what you say?—onweel. Ja! unvill."

"What's wrong with them'?" cried both lads in a breath.

The Eskimo shook his head pathetically.

"I no know," he said. "Dey yelp, dey spik like papooses. Lis'en!"

He held up his hand, and the boys heard a faint yelping sound, exactly like the cry of a child in great pain.

"Dey start dees day," said the Eskimo. "Dey seek."

And then, English failing him, he launched forth into his own tongue, which the boys followed with difficulty.

"I think they have eaten bad food," said Nagathchook simply. "They have pains in their bellies. See this." He went into the nearest kennel and dragged out a dog. It lay prone on the deck, whining mournfully, and as the boys dropped on their knees beside the suffering brute it turned filmy, weary eyes on their faces, and seemed to be entreating them to put an end to its suffering.

"Fetch Dr. Vyner," said Harold, and Monro slipped away, to return with the surgeon, who joined the little group. But almost as Vyner lifted the drooping head the dog gave a whine and lay quite still.

"It's dead," said the surgeon. "Poor brute. I wonder what it's had?"

Nagathchook slipped into the kennel again

and pulled out another dog ; it died before he had stretched it on the deck, and the same with another. The kennels were in darkness, and the whining sound within seemed to stop quite suddenly. When they brought a lantern and examined the place they found four dogs lying stone dead, and five more in their last agonies.

Monro sat down with his chest heaving strongly ; Harold turned away, for it is a sad sight to see dogs one has almost loved die by the many. Nagathchook openly blubbered great tears ; he took the dead heads into his lap one after another, and mourned over them like a mother over her young. The dogs were all he had in the world ; they were father, mother, and brother to him, he said. But they were dead, and it seemed as if nothing more were to be done in the matter.

"We'll make a post-mortem examination of the bodies of a few of the poor things," said Vynner. "I'd like to know why they've died so suddenly. They must have got tainted fish, or something of the kind."

He was too busy that day to do what he said, and next morning five more dogs were dead, whilst two of the reindeer were showing signs of pain.

"This is getting beyond a joke," said the surgeon angrily, when the fact was brought to his notice. "They can't all have eaten bad food ; but I'll make sure."

But he found opposition where he least

expected it. To Nagathchook the dead dogs were sacred; he would not permit other hands than his to touch them—far less would he hear of post-mortem examinations.

They could do nothing—except nurse the dogs which had not died, and save them if possible. For the rest of that day the two lads ministered to a dozen suffering dogs, and by dint of unsparing attention and the free use of every drug Dr. Vyner could think of, they managed to save the lives of ten. It was hard work; it meant constant, unremitting care; but Monro rose to the emergency like a man. He gave the poor animals as much attention as if they were children; he spent painstaking hour after hour in rubbing their stiffening limbs and coaxing restoratives down their parched, dry throats. And always at his back was Dr. Vyner, cunning beyond the ordinary, leaving no stone unturned to bring success out of what seemed like certain defeat. By ten o'clock that evening the dogs were out of danger, weak still, almost unable to lift their heads from the thick beds of straw which had been laid down for them, but breathing evenly, and able to put out trembling tongues to lick the hands of their benefactors.

"There must be a guard put over the kennels to-night," said Mr. Latimer. "It may have been the food that has caused all this trouble; but we should be fools to let the affair pass without taking extra precautions."

The lads were stiff and sore, almost dropping

for want of rest, for the violent exertions to which they had been subjected had taken more out of them than they knew. Yet, like the gallant fellows they were, they volunteered to establish a regular watch and ward, and because Mr. Latimer knew how jealous they were for the welfare of the dogs, he gave permission.

It fell to Monro to keep the watch from midnight until three in the morning. He wrapped himself snugly in his great fur coat ; felt in the pocket to make sure that his revolver was ready to hand, and began to walk steadily up and down. But the chill of the air made him drowsy ; he fought against it defiantly, calling on every possible resource to set sleep at bay. He counted up to tens of thousands ; he stood still and swung his arms regularly above his head ; he danced soundless hornpipes in the darkness—he examined the kennels every ten minutes. This lasted for something like an hour and a half. Then—the weariness of his limbs became overpowering. He found himself nodding as he walked ; his head was as heavy as lead. He propped his drooping eyelids open with chilly fingers—it was all in vain. He knew that he ought to keep awake, he knew that he had been placed in a position of trust ; but the drowsiness would not be gainsaid.

"I'll rouse out Harold," he muttered slowly. "He's had a sleep and he'll be better able to keep awake than I can. No, I won't. He's

tired out, too; and he deserves a rest. I'll stick it out—I've kept awake before this."

It was very quiet now in the wide space under the forecastle head. The Eskimos had coiled themselves up amongst their furs and straw, and were slumbering peacefully, secure in the knowledge that one of the superior white race was keeping a vigilant watch and ward. Monro could hear their even breathing, could hear the slow panting of the dogs. Over all other sounds came the harsh grinding rumble of the current-moved ice overside; now and then the *Enterprise* trembled a little as some moving mass lifted her.

Monro fully intended to keep wide awake; he knew that the welfare of the dogs depended on him. How he came to be seated on a loosened bale of moss he could never tell. He tried to rise, but could not; a growing stupor held his will in thrall. It was very comfortable there in the moss, warm and cosy—in a little while, once this deadly sleepiness was overcome, he would rise and recommence his patrol. His hand was on the butt of his revolver; the hardwood stock was comforting to the touch, felt through thick fur gloves. Yes; he would just sit there for a couple of minutes more—he would count a hundred and twenty, and when that was done he would get up and—and——

What was that? A shrill shriek—the shriek of a man in mortal pain. It came again, a note of horrid fear. It was succeeded by a strange

noise: gurglings and pantings. There was a sound of heavy footsteps, the crash of a falling body. Then Monro fought back the inertia that held his senses prisoner, and struggled to his feet. For a while he could see nothing; it was dark. But along the deck shone a single gleam of light; the sound of footsteps came nearer; the shrill cries had died away into a pitiful sobbing.

"What a' tae do here?" asked the voice of the carpenter, and running forward he held up his lamp into Monro's face. The lad stared wonderingly at the light, blinking hard, unable to bring his senses to bear on the matter.

"I don't know," he stammered. "I sat down—then I heard a cry. I'm afraid something awful has happened."

"We'll e'en mak' a tour o' inspection," said Chips, and the two moved in the direction of the soft sobbing sound. Then as the lamp's rays shone on the deck they saw a terrible sight. Lying full length on the planking, one arm thrown up to keep off the attack, the other lying at full length from his side, was the second mate. He was fully dressed; but his cap had fallen from his head. It was not this, however, which attracted their attention mostly. The man was suffering acute agony; and well he might, for standing over him, growling softly, every muscle stiff with rage and frenzy, was Lootchik-na, the big husky. And its teeth were embedded in the officer's throat.

Mr. Slazenby had met with the reward of his treachery. As yet no definite idea of the circumstances could be formed; but within a foot of the man's outstretched hand lay a large piece of dried meat, and a small bottle had fallen to the deck. From it came a strange smell; even above the ordinary smells of the ship its odour could be detected. He was still struggling weakly; clutching at the dog's throat with trembling fingers, doing his utmost to keep off that awful grip. Before Monro and the carpenter could reach him, however, he gave a sharp quiver and lay still.

Monro darted forward, seized the dog by the jaws, and deliberately wrenched them apart. Then, exerting all his strength, he flung the brute backwards, snatched up a coil of rope lying near, and cut it sharply across the eyes. The dog whined, looked up at the lad with pitiful gaze as though wondering at the harshness of the treatment; finally it slunk away out of sight, where it crouched, growling softly to itself.

"We must get him out of this," said Monro a little breathlessly, as he returned to Slazenby's side. Without a word the carpenter bent down and examined the unconscious form.

"He's still leevin'," he remarked. "Weel, he's got what he worrked for. Mon, there'll be a fine tale telled when this wee mannie comes tae his senses. Tak' his feet, Monro; I'll tak' his shoulders. We'll rin him along tae



Mr. Slazebny had met with the reward of his treachery" (see page 206).

the surgeon's room, an' gi'e him in tae safe keepin'."

They staggered aft with their burden. Dr. Vyner turned out on the run, and lost no time in useless exclamations.

"A nasty case," he said, busying himself with lotions and bandages. "Fortunately the jugular's not touched. Jove! what a time he must have had! Hand me over that lint, Monro. No, I don't see why he shouldn't recover; there's no vital spot injured so far as I can see. Of course, there's a danger of hydrophobia; these huskies are twin brothers to wolves, and a wolf-bite is almost deadly. We'll work hard over him, though; but—I shouldn't be surprised if this man never speaks another word so long as he lives?"

Monro and Chips went back to the kennels as soon as Mr. Slazenby was carefully bandaged and placed in a spare bunk in the room the surgeon had converted into a hospital.

"I had ma suspecions o' yon feily," said Chips. "I always had. I thocht I'd keep a bit watch masel' this nicht, but when I seed ye walkin' up and doon sae manful, I e'en took a wee bit nappie masel'. Then I heerd yon havers; mon, it was awesome. So I lit ma lamp, an' cam' oot tae explore. Weel, we've explored. Whit dae ye mak' o' this, Monro?"

He had stooped and picked up the piece of meat that had lain within a short distance of Slazenby's hand. It had the same acrid

odour as was given out by the unstoppered bottle.

"Poison, I ca' it," said the carpenter. "The sharger! D'ye no ken what his trick's been, laddie? He's been poisonin' they dogs, an' he cam' again the nicht tae dae some more o' his evil worrk. But yon fearsome brute must ha'e fa'en tae it. D'ye no see? It kent weel there was some under-handed game afoot, an' it watched --watched more certainly nor you did nor me either. Then--weel, it's an unpleasant subject, an' we needna pursue it further. But we'll gather up these wee relics an' convey 'em tae Dr. Vyner; they'll dae tae add tae his collection."

He picked up the piece of meat and the bottle. Monro meanwhile was exploring amongst the kennels. Nothing apparently had happened there, though the dogs were still uneasy and restless. Loot-chik-na had stopped his low growling, and was crouched in a corner slavishly watching Monro's face. On the lad's calling to him he came creeping forward in a slinking fashion, slavering over his boots, lifting his head pitifully.

"I was only doing my duty as I thought it should be done," the dog seemed to say with its pathetic eyes; and all suddenly Monro seemed to understand.

"Well done, old boy," he said, and stooping, he clapped the great brute heartily on the side. At once Loot-chik-na roused and jumped up, its

great feet on the lad's shoulders. And so peace was restored between boy and dog, and the perfect understanding of the past resumed.

"Yon dog's saved the expedition, tak' ma worrd for't," said Chips. "He's a finer watchman than the twa o' us thegither."

CHAPTER XVI

THE SECOND ATTEMPT—OVER THE ICE

"No, the man's still unconscious," said Dr. Vynner. "He must have had a tremendous shock. No wonder—I wouldn't like to have that dog at my throat. But then I don't deserve he should fly at me. Well, Latimer, I've made my examination now. The case stands as clear as day. First thing I did I examined my surgery, and found the bottle of cyanide almost empty. I haven't used a drop myself since we started; but perhaps you'll know that cyanide is very volatile—it soon loses its strength. It's a good thing for us that it does, or else there mightn't have been a single dog left alive by this time. As far as I can guess from the indications, that scoundrel looted my surgery in my absence. I don't know how—I thought I always kept the door locked. However he did it, he had the temerity to steal my poison, and once he had got it the rest was easy. He had only to pour a little on several pieces of meat; those dogs are so notoriously ravenous that they would bolt anything without pausing to ask whether it was good for them. So the first batch of poisoned dogs fell under treatment. They got the cyanide before its strength had evaporated

fully. Evidently Slazenby was too cunning to poison them all at once ; he just doctored a few at a time, knowing that if they had all died at one time the cause would be obvious. He wanted the thing to appear like an epidemic. But each day meant that the strength of the poison evaporated a little more ; and so the last batch didn't die—we managed to save them. Very well. He must have been disgusted at the ill-success of his venture ; evidently he hadn't counted on our being able to nurse the brutes back to life. We have Monro to thank for that ; without him and Harold I'd have been useless.

"Being disgusted because so many of the dogs hadn't died, he must have intended to make one big attempt to do away with them all. But this time he hadn't counted on Lootchik-na. That dog has as much intelligence as a man. It must have waited for him—must have recognised his step ; and then, when Slazenby approached the kennels with his poisoned meat all ready—yes, that piece of flesh was simply reeking of cyanide, and the bottle was partly full of it—he must have made his leap. It was lucky for us that he did, else there wouldn't have been a dog alive by now."

"But I can't understand why he did it," said Mr. Latimer, when the doctor came to a breathless stop. "He had no reason for this kind of treachery. He was well paid—he was well fed ; we hadn't done anything to cause him to turn on us like this."

"No; there was no cause—so far as we can see," interpolated Captain Labby. "But rest assured, sir, there's some reason. I don't pretend to guess at the spirit that actuates a bad man; he might just have done it out of sheer malice. We shall never know the truth until he comes round; even then we may not guess it. But one thing seems certain: this man has acted the part of a traitor all along. Do you remember how that topsail sheet carried away when we made our dash for the opening? I said at the time that it had been cut—that there was foul play at the bottom of it. Do you remember again how the submarine went wrong? I can see the lads there looking wise. What is it, boys?"

"We found a piece of metal jammed in the machinery," said Harold. "The chief couldn't tell how it had got there."

"Well, there you are, sir. There's been a deliberate, systematic attempt to prevent you from making a success of the expedition. Everything points to Slazenby as the guilty party; and if he does recover I'll see to it that it's out of his power to repeat his attempts. The man has been almost a murderer three times, for it's something precious like murder to poison dogs, I take it."

"He's got his punishment, though," said Dr. Vyner solemnly. "Even if he does recover—which isn't likely, for a wound such as he has in this climate won't heal in a hurry—he'll

never speak another word. The dog's teeth penetrated to the vocal chords, and he'll be as dumb as a stone man for the rest of his life."

"Then he has only himself to blame," said Mr. Latimer sternly. "There is no doubt that a wicked man is sure to be found out. Not always so swiftly or so dramatically as this one was, but—well, it's an unpleasant subject, and we might as well change it. You'll do all you can for the man, Vyner? I'd like to know what caused him to act as he did; there's some mystery at the bottom of it all."

"Oh, I'll do my best, of course, even if it's only to save him for the gallows," said Dr. Vyner emphatically. "But——" he extended his hands in a hopeless gesture, and those gathered in the saloon knew that he considered Mr. Slazenby's chance of life was not worth a red cent.

"Now we've something else to discuss," went on Mr. Latimer. "We shall have the sun with us in a day or two, and as soon as it appears I intend to make my final dash. Everything depends on this last effort; if it fails we are ruined. But we don't intend to fail—eh, my boys?"

Both lads chimed in emphatically. No, they were not in a mood for further failure.

"So, as so much depends on this expedition, we must not abate a single precaution. The sooner we get started the better. The dogs

are not yet well; we shall give them another week to recover completely; and then, as the first part of the journey will be done by reindeer, they will have a still further chance of gaining strength. We are practically ready at any moment."

Harold looked at Monro, and the same thought was in both their minds. It was Harold who spoke it aloud.

"Who's going, pater?"

Mr. Latimer's eyes twinkled. "Well, for one, Slazenby isn't," he said. "Now, I want men I can trust. I should say Dr. Vyner for one."

He looked at the surgeon, and Vyner gulped something down in his throat. It had been the dream of this happy man's life to form one of the party that would make the historic dash; but duty demanded that he should hold back, and in spite of his happy-go-lucky nature, Dr. Vyner had a strong sense of duty.

"I—I can't offer," he said quietly. "The men need me. Oh, yes, it's breaking my heart to have to give up the idea, but—I can't go. You know me well enough to know that I'm not funkng it, Latimer. But if any of those men died I should feel myself guilty of their murder, supposing I went. They trust me to bring them round, and—I'll have to do it."

It cost him more to give up the opportunity than anyone there could guess, but he was guided by his unfaltering sense of what was right. Despite

everything, he was surgeon to the expedition, and he must remain with the ship.

Mr. Latimer held out his hand, and gripped that of Vyner, and it is probable that he understood what that act of self-sacrifice had meant to his friend.

"There isn't a man in the world I would rather have had with me than you, Vyner," he exclaimed. "Am I right in thinking that if it hadn't been for this new case you might have taken the chance?"

Vyner nodded without a word. So Slazenby's work was still having its effect on the expedition, and the Doctor's inherent nobility showed more than ever. He was sacrificing his life's desire for the sake of a man who was practically a murderer at heart!

"Then it simply resolves itself into this," said Mr. Latimer. "I am going; Captain Labby cannot leave the ship; for I shall rely on him to watch her through the ice. Mr. Syzer—he will be needed on board, too. There is no one else—except you two boys. And as three will be a very good number—well, you'll go."

Then he was overwhelmed by violent hugs from his son and nephew. When he could release himself he went on: "We shall take a certain number of Eskimos with us, too; they will be necessary. Now, since you boys are to accompany me, it's as well that you should know exactly what we are about to do. Our last observations placed the ship in $84^{\circ} 51' N$.

latitude, and $25^{\circ} 38'$ W. longitude. The under-ice current has drifted us somewhat to the westward, and always to the north. That means that we have a distance of exactly three hundred and nine miles to go to reach the North Pole.

"We shall start as follows. There will be ten sledges, with a reindeer to each. These sledges will be loaded with provisions and necessities of life, and there will be a Lapp or an Eskimo to each. The dogs will not be required to drag the sledges—at first. If we can manage to make the reindeer do all the work, well and good; but I am afraid they may not be able to stand the bitter cold we may find further north. But they will serve a double purpose. If they fail to face the cold, we can kill them and rely on them for an addition to our food supply. I think I can safely say that we shall be able to make over a hundred and fifty miles with the deer, and by that time we shall be half-way, with our dogs practically unused—fresh and ready for anything. We shall establish depôts here and there, caches for stores and so on. If possible we shall leave an Eskimo at each cache, for these men can live under almost any conditions. Then, when we are returning, we shall be able to count on finding food and help at every turn of the way. When we have got to within say fifty miles of the Pole, we shall make one stupendous dash, which will mean all or nothing.

"That is my plan in a few words. Now, to

work. There is still a good deal to be done ; instruments must be tested, everything must be in the most perfect order ; for the omission of a single precaution might mean failure. And we dare not fail now. Monro, I shall leave it to you to see that the dogs have every attention. Harold, you will attend to the loading and supplying of the sledges. Captain Labby, be good enough to see that those sledges are in perfect condition. And you, Vyner—well, you have the hardest work of any. You have to wait here for our return ; and—if we do not return, you must go home and break the news to those we have left behind."

" Yes, that would be the hardest work of all," said the surgeon, now completely serious. Then he brightened up, and slapped his friend on the back.

" *Nil desperandum*," he cried. " You're not going to fail. You will place the British flag on the very Pole, this journey. And the only news that I shall have to take home will be that three intrepid men have done that which no other man has ever done."

The meeting broke up, each going to his respective work. An air of purpose such as had never been noticed before was now evident throughout the ship. Everyone suddenly grew busy, and the healthful activity had its effect on all. There was no more grumbling, no more evil looks and words. Men who had been bitter enemies forgot their enmity ; now that the second

mate was out of the way the discontented sailors forgot their grievances and worked together loyally for the welfare of the expedition. It had become a personal matter with all hands—the success of this dash; and each man vowed that whatever he could do should be done. They were about to make history—the British flag was to be planted on the North Pole; therefore, it behoved every man aboard the *Enterprise* to do all in his power.

Chips surveyed the row of sledges that he had made, and rubbed his hands gleefully. "I'll ha'e helped a bittie," he said cheerfully. "But Nagathhook there's done more'n me. He's gi'en me hints wi'out which I'd hae been lost, ay, fair lost."

During all this time of preparation Monro attended painstakingly to the dogs, feeding them cunningly on strengthening food. The reindeer were again all right; their constitutions seemed to have thrown off completely the effect of the poison; but now and then the dogs would twitch suddenly as if some remnants of pain remained with them. Then, when all was in readiness, the crimson brightness in the south grew still brighter; over the horizon there peeped a glittering radiance; the twilight fled before the advance of the six-months' day; and the time had come.

Two more days of marvellous activity. Sledge-loads had to be tested carefully, so that the deer might not have unfair shares to drag;

rifles had to be seen to ; cunning preparations of drugs made up by Dr. Vyner had to be explained. On April 2nd the reindeer were led down the sloping gangway to the ice ; the sledges were hoisted outboard, and the dogs were marshalled into order. The ten Eskimos who were to accompany the expedition stood as stolid as if nothing out of the common were toward. The Lapps also betrayed but small emotion ; it was nothing to them that the Pole should be discovered. But very different was it with the boys and their leader. Mr. Latimer was bright of eye and pale of face ; his lips were set together in a firm line of purpose. The two boys were wildly excited, but out of consideration for Dr. Vyner's feelings they restrained themselves to the best of their ability. But now and then their spirits became uncontrollable ; they flung up their caps into the air ; they yelled with sheer delight.

"I'm coming with you to give you a send-off," said Dr. Vyner at the last, and he ran nimbly down the gangway, despite his furs. The men had climbed on the rails, up the rigging, everywhere. Mr. Macpherson had got steam up on the donkey engines for the express purpose of sounding the whistle in honour of the start—Captain Labby had a double-barrelled rifle under his arm. The sledges formed into line ; the reindeer threw up their heads and stamped impatiently on the snow ; the dogs gave a low whine of pleasure.

"Now, lads, let them have it!" It was Captain Labby's voice, ringing out through the rarefied air like a thunderclap. The whistle started its loud booming; the skipper fired both barrels of his rifle into the air; the mate followed suit, and then, from every throat that could emit a sound—ay, and the scurvy-stricken men had come on deck to join in the good work—such a cheer rose as probably those solitudes had never echoed to before. Round on round, and still another one; a waving of caps, despite the bitter cold and the danger of frost-bite. Harold and Monro felt their hearts beating quickly; tears came to their eyes, only to be frozen before they could be forced back. Then they turned and waved their caps silently, for they could find no voice to cheer.

"Good-bye, Vyner. Remember! if we do not return, you must break the news to my wife."

"Good-bye, Latimer. That's a job I should very much detest, and I know I sha'n't have to do it. Good-bye, boys! And if there is a pole—you know, a real pole!—be sure and bring me a piece of it back."

Then the surgeon gave each extended hand a hearty grip, patted everyone in sight on the back, and strode away to the south where the crow's-nest of the *Enterprise* showed a single speck of black in a waste of frozen white. He did not look back—he could not bear it, for he knew that he might never see one of that gallant little party again.

CHAPTER XVII

THE PERILS OF A POLAR EVENING

FOR ten hours the expedition went forward without meeting any great impediments. But by the time the hands of Mr. Latimer's watch pointed to eight o'clock the ice was growing extremely lumpy, and as the reindeer were worn out, despite the slow rate of travel, for they had not been allowed to proceed at more than two miles per hour, it was decided to come to a halt. Immediately Mr. Latimer spoke the word the procession broke up. Every man busied himself to the utmost; the Eskimos commenced the erection of *igloos*—shelters built of ice and snow; and the lads were amazed at the rapidity of their work. They knew exactly what to do, and did it without a word being spoken. Each builder began by clearing a circular space, and making it level. Then blocks of loose ice were dragged in to form a rough circle, and were swiftly trimmed to shape. Gradually blocks were piled on blocks, until the walls were the height of the men's shoulders and about two feet thick. After this the builders who had been working inside now came out, and resumed their work again. They hove up smaller blocks and trimmed them into

semi-circular shape. Within less than an hour of the word being given to halt the *igloos* were complete: one big one for Mr. Latimer and the boys, another bigger still for the Eskimos, and a third for the dogs. This was made more roughly, and, considering the number of its inmates, smaller than the others, so that the dogs would be compelled to crouch together closely, and thus obtain warmth from each other. The reindeer were hobbled to prevent them from straying, and given abundance of moss to eat; this fodder, being light, had been compressed into small bulk and they had a considerable quantity with them. The sledges were all drawn up to windward and piled there to form an additional protection against the biting wind which was sweeping harshly from the north-west—so harshly indeed, that did any single man relinquish his efforts for a moment he was almost certain to be smitten by frost-bite. Twice during the erection of the *igloos* Harold felt his nose lose all sensation, and was compelled to cram snow on to his face and rub as hard as he could to restore the circulation. Monro, as soon as the dogs' *igloo* was built, ushered his pets within, and attended to their welfare. He fed them cautiously, for though the expedition was well supplied with provisions, it was necessary to exercise a constant restraint on expenditure of food.

The dogs showed the results of their recent training under Monro. There was no fighting, no attempt to snatch the food from his hands;

hungry as they were, they waited patiently for each morsel of dried fish or meat.

It was not dark by the time the work was finished, although the sun had disappeared from sight. There was, however, a glow over the northern horizon to tell where the monarch of day was moving round towards the east in readiness to leap upwards above the ice. A mellow crimson light, like the faint flush of a tropical dawn, filled the air, the majestic beauty of the scene was indescribable. They were encamped on a vast field of glittering whiteness; look where they would, they could see nothing but snow and ice. It was piled up into vast ridges ahead of them, away to the south it spread like a monstrous plain. So far, the going had been comparatively easy; presently, the rough hills ahead told a tale that might have deterred less stout-hearted travellers.

The cold by this time was intense, for a fresh breeze was blowing biting. It was more than their lives were worth to expose any portion of naked skin to the blast; a reading of the spirit thermometer told them the temperature was fifty-one degrees below zero. The mercury thermometer was useless; the fluid had frozen solid when the temperature reached forty below zero Fahrenheit. But they had been prepared for this terrible cold, and had brought the requisite instruments with them. There was a strange moaning in the air; it was not the voice of the wind at all—something entirely different.

It was in reality the air protesting against the terrible rigour of the cold.

The three explorers crept into their *igloo* when they had satisfied themselves that all was in order, and set to work to prepare a meal. It was not much they could do, but up near the roof of the snow-hut hung a lamp of soapstone, filled with frozen fat from the seals they had killed long before. A couple of wicks were embedded in the fat, and their heat melted a little of the fuel from time to time, thus enabling them to keep a steady flame burning. Over this lamp Harold heated a pannikinful of water; it was snow in reality, and he had been compelled to fill the vessel twenty times before he got a sufficient quantity of water. Meanwhile Mr. Latimer cut up pemmican and served out biscuits—two biscuits and a thick slab of pemmican to each. Monro busied himself in writing up his meteorological reports, indicating everything that had passed during the day's journey: the state of the wind and weather, temperature, state of the barometer, the exact time of sunset, and the various other things they had noted. It was difficult work writing, for the ink froze from time to time, although the bottle was hung up close beside the lamp. But Monro persevered; he knew that every item he marked down would be subjected to a searching examination by experts, and the slightest flaw would be pounced upon to prove that they had not reached the Pole. Mr. Latimer had mentioned how ready

those who had not had the courage to attempt the expedition would be to criticise and condemn.

"There—it's boiling at last; but if I look at it it will freeze," said Harold, lifting down the pannikin with a fur mitten on his hand.

"Don't move it, Harold," exclaimed Mr. Latimer laughingly. "So; that's the way we make tea up in the Arctic." He threw in a big handful of tea, stirred it up, hung the pot over the lamp for a minute, and then dropped a piece of ice into the bubbling confusion of water and leaves. "That makes it drinkable," he explained. "The sudden cold sends the leaves to the bottom. Sugar—here it is. If we pour this stuff out it will freeze solid, so we must drink it out of its native pannikin."

And they did. It was a strange meal. Through the walls of the ice-hut stole a faint elusive light, but the real illumination of the interior came from the little lamp. They squatted close together for warmth, eating heartily of the simple fare, wishing that it were double the quantity, yet knowing that only by stinting themselves at the commencement could they hope to keep sufficient provender to enable them to keep up their strength when the last lap of the race hove in sight.

"Fill up the pannikin again," said Mr. Latimer, when the meal was done. "We'll have a good nightcap of cocoa—there's fat in it, and it will help to keep us warm—before we turn in."

He was obeyed implicitly. Now that the

expedition was fairly started there was never any question as to the spirits of the explorers. A cheerful obedience characterised everything; they knew that to harbour the slightest resentment against one another might well have a fatal result. In that bitter cold the mind might go on feeding on imagined insults and the like, until it would give way under the strain, and no one could tell what the end would be in that case. Only unstinted cheerfulness would help them through to the goal.

Once the cocoa was fairly under preparation Mr. Latimer lit a pipe and smoked contentedly.

"The great thing is to harbour our strength at the first," he said. "So many explorers have committed the gigantic folly of expending themselves in the first dash, forgetting that human endurance is limited. So long as we have the reindeer with us we should be able to take things fairly easy. It will be after we have left the last of them behind that we shall need to make a big spurt, working at breaking strain all the time until we reach the Pole."

"That will be worth straining for," said Monro quietly. "Say, Uncle Harry, what are your feelings on the matter, anyhow? Do you think we've got any sort of a chance of getting there?"

"Of course I do, my lad. We should be poor-spirited men to give up hope thus early. Besides, we *have* to get there, so that's an end of it. Now, we must keep our eyes wide open to-morrow for any signs of life. I don't think

we shall find much life of any kind as far north as this. You see, in nature the strong prey on the weak, and the weak couldn't live up here, so the strong would have to go hungry. Therefore they'll go to some place where the weak are to be found. We might happen across an occasional Polar bear; but even that is doubtful. But we must do all in our power to get some fatty animals, for their blubber will be a matter of necessity to us. The more fat we can eat the warmer we shall keep."

The cocoa was ready by this time, and each drank copiously, feeling the better for the draught. Except in cases of the direst emergency no spirits would be used at all, for Mr. Latimer held to the opinion that the heat bred of spirits was so temporary as to be useless, considering that a greater cold invariably followed. The expedition was to be conducted on strictly temperance lines.

At a height of about eighteen inches from the floor, Nagathhook, who had built the white men's *igloo* himself, had erected a sort of broad shelf of piled snow and ice. This shelf was to form their beds; and after they had taken a swift visit to the other *igloos* and the barricade of sledges behind which the reindeer lay, they made preparations for the night. These were quite simple. They stripped off their outer furs, which they suspended in the dome-shaped roof of the hut near the lamp, to dry. Then each slipped into his sleeping bag of leather lined with fur. There was no attempt at washing; they

would probably never know the feel of soap for weeks—perhaps for months. What did that matter? Once the work was done, they would be able to wash every five minutes if they wished.

The two boys, being healthy animals, simply closed their eyes and were off to sleep in a moment. Not so Mr. Latimer. For a long while he lay staring at the strange shadows cast by the little lamp on the roof, wondering, wondering. There were so many chances of failure that it seemed impossible to see success ahead. There might conceivably be yawning chasms in the ice impossible to cross. Such chasms would turn them back hopelessly, unless—unless it became possible to float the wooden sledges across. Then there was always the chance of meeting an impassable barrier of mountains. Many men had said that a vast mountain range existed near the Pole; some even went so far as to say that the Pole itself was a spouting volcano. Everywhere he looked he saw difficulties and obstacles, enough to break down the determination of a dozen heroes. But Mr. Latimer did not pose as a hero. He was a simple, determined man, who set his eyes on a goal and scorned all impediments. If human endurance could do it he would gain the Pole.

Doubts crept into his mind again; to set them at bay he reached for his observation books, and commenced to write down various information that his quick eyes had gathered during the journey. He recalculated every observation

taken; and when he saw that everything was in order, that they were now less than three hundred miles from the Pole, he put the book aside with a sigh of content, pillowed his head on his arm, drew the mouth of the sleeping bag well over his head, and soon his even breathing announced the fact that he, too, was sound asleep.

It was somewhere about two o'clock in the morning that Monro roused suddenly, threw aside his furs, and sat up. He had heard something—it seemed to him the dogs were calling. Just before he wakened he had been dreaming of that night aboard the *Enterprise* when the second mate received his punishment; and when he did awake his first thought was that he was back on the ship, with another treacherous attempt in process. The whining grew in volume. Without a sound, for he had no wish to disturb the other sleepers with a false alarm, the lad slipped into his furs and crept towards the low tunnel that did duty for a doorway. He dropped on to hands and knees silently, and was just about to enter the tunnel, when he drew back, a cry of alarm trembling on his lips. He had heard a scraping, shuffling sound; had heard a low, fierce growl; and a hot, evil breath had fanned his cheek. Up to the moment of feeling that noxious air the lad had not been more than half awake, for in those cold northern latitudes the brain takes time to arouse completely; but now a sudden spasm of fear came to him, and he

drew back into the hut, trembling in every limb. The scraping sound grew louder. Harold stirred uneasily; but Mr. Latimer, worn out completely, still slumbered serenely. Suddenly the doorway seemed to crumble away to nothing; the whole erection rocked on its foundations; and before the lad could speak or cry out, the head of the biggest Polar bear he had ever seen in his life protruded into the place. It gave a blood-curling growl as its eyes rested on the cowering lad. Monro knew that the rifles had been left outside on the sledges, carefully packed; he thought the place was without defences. He tried to cry out—in vain; no sound would leave his parched lips. And the bear was slowly working its way into the hut; already one gigantic paw was tearing away the ice and snow; Monro watched the great armed paw scraping resolutely. In a little while those claws would be tearing his life from his throat. He must do something.

"Uncle Harry!" he yelled, and the bag in which Mr. Latimer slept moved. But the bear was aroused at the cry; it made a stupendous effort and pushed its way in still further. It lifted its paw; another moment and the lad's scalp had been torn off, when there came three sharp reports from behind him. They sounded like thunder in the little building; they echoed angrily. In a flash Monro turned, his eyes smarting from the acrid smoke, his ears deafened at the stunning reports, to see Harold sitting

up in his sleeping bag with a big army revolver held in his hand. The lad had fired three times, using the trigger only, and the heavy man-stopping bullets had gone unerringly to their mark. One had struck the monster in the eye, another in the forehead, from which it had glanced aside, as the frontal bone of a bear is capable of turning anything but an Express bullet; the third had inflicted a raking gash on the brute's cheek. It lay there on the blood-stained snow, not yet dead by any means, but stunned. Before it could recover Harold leapt to the ground, ran in, placed the muzzle of his revolver in the bear's ear, and fired the contents of the remaining three chambers into its brain. The vast body quivered a little, then lay quite still. All this had happened practically instantaneously; indeed, the thunder of the first shots had not died away before the second three sounded loudly. So that Mr. Latimer put his head out of the bag just in time to see the bear's carcass give its last quiver.

"I owed you that, old chap, anyhow," said Harold calmly, slipping fresh cartridges into the cylinder of his pistol. "That sort of makes up for that other bear. I say, isn't he a monster?"

Mr. Latimer was looking amazedly at the body; he could not understand what had happened yet. But the facts were swiftly explained to him, and he realised that he had cause for extreme thankfulness. Had Harold not had the

forethought to bring his pet revolver into the *igloo* with him they might all have paid the price of their negligence with their lives.

"No, I don't think I was afraid," said Harold to Monro, when the American lad asked if he were not shivering with fright. "You see, there wasn't time. The first thing I saw after I heard you scream was the head of the bear, and just as I saw it I remembered the revolver, and so—there you are."

"You're a braver chap than I am," said Monro gravely, and Harold laughed. He knew that the sudden bravery of a man newly aroused from sleep is very different from the long-drawn-out enduring courage of a man who deliberately stalks a bear in the open, and stabs it to the heart with a bowie knife.

"Then this must be a lesson to us," said Mr. Latimer gravely. "We must never be parted from our rifles after this. I was so busy counting on other and bigger dangers that I forgot those that lie nearer at hand."

By this time the Eskimos had aroused, and were clamouring about the *igloo*. Mr. Latimer shouted out to them to drag the carcass out and get it skinned at once, before it froze; and this they did. Monro slipped out of the *igloo* as soon as the bear was withdrawn, and hastened to the sledges, where he possessed himself of his rifle, from which he refused to be parted again. He paid a visit to the dogs' shelter on his way back, and found them almost mad with

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excitement. Especially so was Loot-chik-na ; but when the big dog heard Monro's voice it quietened at once.

"After all, you saved the situation again," said Monro, fondling the dog's ears. "We're going to owe you quite a lot before this trip's ended, I see."

When the lad looked in at the Eskimos' quarters before turning in he saw that they had skinned the bear and were busily engaged in devouring huge masses of raw flesh. It was a grisly sight, but he endured it long enough to beg a portion of the meat, and with this he went back to the dogs.

"You deserve it all," he said, as he flung the flesh to them. And then he went back to the company of his uncle and cousin. There were no more alarms that night. They had hurled snow and ice against the opening made by the bear—they slept again in perfect security.

CHAPTER XVIII

WITHIN A HUNDRED MILES OF THE NORTH POLE

NEXT day they tasted to the full the meaning of Arctic rigours. They were early astir, for the bitter cold made long sleep impossible, unless that sleep was the prelude to death; and when the lamp burned down and the temperature of the *igloo* dropped several degrees Mr. Latimer roused at once.

"Up, lads," he cried, and they leaped up like dogs. Then they rubbed their eyes, as if unable to believe the evidence of their senses. And indeed the sight was strange. The walls of the *igloo* were hung with a fantastic decoration of filigree white. It was almost like lace—very beautiful, but it crumbled away at a touch. Their breath had frozen solid after the lamp burned low, and this was the result.

Mr. Latimer was already at work refilling the lamp, and as soon as it was burning, the operations of the night before were repeated. One meal is very much like another, and no good purpose could be served by describing the explorers' daily eating; suffice it that after bolting a huge pannikinful of steaming cocoa, they turned out of the *igloo*, to meet Nagathchook, who came towards them bearing an old kerosene

tin, which contained bear's fat. It had been so thoroughly melted that even now it was not solid, and the Eskimo made signs to them to drink it off. Harold tried, but failed, so did Monro; Mr. Latimer contrived to drink a little, but from the expression of his face it was a revolting task.

"It very good—keep um warm," said the Eskimo with a grin. Harold grimaced; and before anyone could gasp the little man tilted the tin over his open mouth and drained its contents. There must have been over two quarts of the grease; and he hardly took a breath. Then he smiled fatly, and rubbed his rotund stomach.

"It very good," he remarked.

They lost no time now in starting on their march. The Lapps had already got the reindeer yoked to the sledges; the dogs were being ushered into order. They packed their sleeping bags on the sledges, piled up the few utensils they had used, gave the word, and the expedition advanced slowly, Northward Ho!

As yet the going was comparatively easy; the lads and Mr. Latimer, therefore, did not avail themselves of the assistance of the sledges, but tramped forward resolutely on foot. Their goggled eyes constantly searched the whiteness for any sign of animal life, but they saw nothing, not even a bird. It seemed as if life were frozen in those remote icy fastnesses; not even a wing whirred, or a seal growled. All was silence, save for the moaning sound beneath the scream of the ever-rising wind.

At noon they halted. The sun showed above the southern horizon, and Mr. Latimer at once took an observation. It was too cold to work it up at present; that would be done later, when they halted for the night. But he calculated they had made seven miles since starting, which, considering that the ice was now getting rougher, was very good. They ate a hurried meal of pemmican and biscuit, and went forward. When they finally halted amongst a rough waste of piled up ice-blocks, and built their shelters, it was found that one of the Lapps was snow-blind. He had been provided with coloured glasses but had failed to use them. He was now useless to the expedition; and as Mr. Latimer's calculations showed him that he had made thirty-four miles on his way, he decided to leave one sledge behind here, and allow two Lapps to return to the ship.

The work of the day had been arduous in the extreme. At one point the going had resolved into a mere scramble; the reindeer had been lashed to their full speed, and had been sent tearing like mad over the rough ice, with the dogs yelling along in their wake, and the explorers bringing up a panting rear. The wind steadily grew in force, the temperature had dropped to fifty-five below zero, and the falling of a single degree meant increased terrors.

In places it had been a matter of the extremest difficulty to get the reindeer up the sloping hummocks that beset their way. Times without

number had Mr. Latimer called a halt, to search for a more practicable passage, but all without effect. There was no break in the roughness ; it seemed as if at some remote age there had been a volcanic upheaval which had thrown the ice everywhere. There was nothing for it save to go forward, with whips cracking and voices shouting, with every available man shoving behind the laden sledges. At last they came to rest on a comparatively level spot, where they camped.

Next morning a thin powdery snow was driving across the ice. It was colder than ever, and to add to the discomforts it was possible to feel a distinct movement in the ice underfoot. It was as if the sea underlying the frozen covering had been lashed to fury, and was chafing to break its bonds. Nagathchook came to the explorer and suggested that it would be better to halt for that day until the weather conditions improved somewhat, but naturally Mr. Latimer was aroused to fever heat. He was all for pressing forward without a moment's delay ; as he well knew, the weather, instead of improving, might grow worse, and every mile now counted.

Preparations were therefore made for a start. Two of the sledges were harnessed to teams of dogs, the reindeer which had before been used, were shot and skinned, and the flesh was used in part to make up the amount of provisions already expended. The snow-blind Lapp was taken in charge by the driver of the second sledge ; each man was given as much food as he could

carry, a rifle and a pocket compass—of which latter article the explorers had brought a considerable supply—and the two men set off for the south, bearing a message to Dr. Vyner that all was well. The rest of the reindeer flesh was now carefully cached under blocks of ice; a tin flag with an iron flagstaff was erected at the summit of the pile to guide the returning explorers, and all was ready for moving.

It was terrible work now. Harold, struggling gamely forward beside his father, felt that every breath he drew was an agony. The rush of cold air to his lungs gave him constant pain; it seemed as if an iron band were slowly tightening around his chest. But Mr. Latimer strode forward undismayed, cheering his son on by an occasional word. After an hour or two of living torture the lad became accustomed to the bitterness, and threw back his head defiantly. The going was distinctly bad. Everywhere they looked they saw great piled masses of ice, and in places the action of the wind and snow had worn these masses so smooth that it was impossible to obtain any sort of a foothold at all. There was nothing for it save to skirt the bigger obstacles, then to harness all the reindeer to one sledge, whip them to a gallop and literally tear the conveyance out of the roughnesses. This kind of work naturally damaged the sledges considerably; but they carried with them strips of whalebone and rawhide, with which repairs were effected whenever a stop was possible. As soon as one sledge was

over the worst of the going, another would be hauled up, and so on, until the entire expedition had progressed a matter of a mile or so.

The dogs were found to be invaluable even at this early stage. They dragged their sledges up places which seemed to affright the reindeer, and dragged them up at a gallop, too. Monro had already constituted himself driver of a sledge and the way the lad handled his huskies was a sight worth seeing. Loot-chik-na was harnessed in the lead, and the intelligent brute seemed to understand every accent of his driver's voice. When it came to a steeply sloping ascent, with broken ice everywhere, Monro would climb down swiftly from his sledge, unfurl his mighty whip, and stand in readiness. Then: "Moosh! Moosh!" His clear voice sounded like a trumpet in the howling wastes. The dogs pricked up their ears, the great whip cracked and spluttered over their backs, the lad set off at a staggering run, and away went the sledge, rocking and reeling like a ship in a tide-rip, rasping over the ice at a gallop, with the dogs straining at the traces, the runners screaming aloud in protest against the rough treatment they were receiving; up and on, with a rattle and a crash; with the whip making the day hideous, and Monro's cheering voice dominating every other sound, until the difficult part was negotiated, and the sledge was once more travelling on comparatively smooth ice.

For three days they travelled thus. At the

end of the second day after the Lapps had left, another reindeer was killed; part of its flesh was given to the dogs, the rest was piled on the sledges. The sledge that the dead animal had drawn was carefully cached and left behind, with its driver and an Eskimo to guard it in the *igloo* which was erected that night. There the guardians were to remain for three weeks, and if at the end of that time they were not relieved by the returning explorers, they were to raid the cache and make the best of their way back to the ship.

Five days had now passed, and the latest observations showed Mr. Latimer that he was only two hundred and ten miles from the pole. His precise position at this time was $86^{\circ} 30' N.$ latitude, $18^{\circ} 45' W.$ longitude. He had been unable to strike a due north course, having been compelled to make many detours to avoid piled masses of ice. The health of the party was in the main good; though one or two of the Eskimos were complaining of the cold. This was strange, for the white explorers were by this inured to the extreme temperature—or lack of it. But by this time the effect of their naturally hardy constitutions was showing plainly. The Eskimos were soft and flabby; they took but little exercise except on such occasions as this; whereas the white men were as hard as nails, and daily growing harder. When, however, on the morning of the sixth day, they poked their heads from the shelter of their *igloo*, Mr. Latimer

and Harold drew back in a hurry. Something marvellous had occurred. The air seemed to be a mass of solid whiteness ; they could not see the nearest *igloo*, which was less than a dozen feet away. The wind had risen to a yelling gale which deafened them, so that they could not hear each other's voices. It was a terrible day ; the whole world seemed to have gone out in storm and fury. Harold, despite his father's protests, attempted to leave the shelter of the small tunnel and penetrate through the snow-smother to the Eskimos' quarters, but hardly had he left the *igloo* than he was caught up bodily by the wind and dashed away like a feather. He gave a cry, and the wind caught it up gleefully, tossed it aside and seemed to chuckle with fiendish malice. Harold gave himself up for lost. He was being hurled along at a furious rate ; he could do nothing to save himself. Then, just as he counted hope dead, he was conscious of a sudden shock, something seemed to rise up and strike him in the side, an excruciating pang shot through him. Dimly he realised that he had struck against some obstacle, what it was he did not know. The wind still beat down on him, as if striving to claw him up and sweep him away again, but by dint of summoning all his faculties the lad contrived to crawl along the side of the object he had struck, until he rounded it. Under its lee there was some kind of shelter ; he crouched there wearily, the cold benumbing his senses, and sleep creeping over his brain.

Time after time he made a desperate effort to shake off the somnolence that was holding him in thrall; in vain. His eyelids closed; tears started from under them and froze fast. He dragged the lids open; it caused him maddening pain, but he persevered. Then, just as he was about to lose consciousness completely, something seemed to leap upon him. He gave a shrill cry of fear and fumbled for his revolver. It had slipped from his pocket in that mad whirl; he was helpless. But he gathered himself together prepared to do battle for his life with his hands alone; for he was sure that it was a bear that was attacking him. Then a warm wet tongue passed across his half-blinded eyes; he heard a familiar whine, heard a cheering voice; and awoke to see Loot-chik-na slaving over him. Behind the dog was Monro, creeping along on hands and knees, almost spent.

"Uncle wasn't for letting me come," said the American lad. "But I just had to. I knew the dog would find you if you were to be found."

He had brought a flask of spirit with him, and after Harold had drunk a few drops he found his strength return sufficiently to enable him to essay the homeward journey. It was tedious work. Loot-chik-na had some pieces of harness still attached to his body; and Monro solved the problem by hitching these around his cousin's body and calling loudly to the dog, which set its great strength to the task and towed Harold along. It was a tough struggle, the lad's furs

suffered heavily, but after a tremendous effort they gained the *igloo*, where they found Mr. Latimer hastily preparing to start in search. The explorer was white of face and almost trembling; when Monro shouted to him he started like a man who had seen a ghost. Then he welcomed the two young adventurers back from the very jaws of death.

"I never expected to see either of you again," he said brokenly. "Boys, I'm asking too much of you. We'd better turn back."

"Not for me," gasped Harold. "I'm game to go on, aren't you, Mon?"

His cousin nodded emphatically, and after that there was no more talk of giving in.

That day it was impossible to proceed further, the explorers spent the long weary hours snuggled up in their sleeping bags, with Nagathhook busily engaged in making Harold's furs presentable, or rather serviceable, for appearances counted for very little up there.

The three explorers presented a woeful appearance by this time. Mr. Latimer had not shaved for over a week, and the two lads were also well blessed with a fluffy covering on lip and cheek. This hair was more of a nuisance than anything, however, for their breath froze on it, and icicles formed every few minutes, which icicles had to be broken off carefully lest agonising pain should be caused. But there was nothing else for it; it was impossible to shave or wash.

When, on the following morning, they looked

out of the *igloo* the furious gale had subsided considerably, and the driving snow was almost gone. At a distance of about a hundred yards was a mound, and to this *Monro* drew his cousin's attention.

"That's where I found you yesterday," he said. "Guess it's just a block of ice that's been covered up with snow."

Harold could hardly believe the evidence of his own eyes. He could have sworn that he had been hurled at least half a mile, and the journey back had seemed endless. After all, distance is merely relative, and a hundred yards in the Arctic may easily take more passing than a hundred miles in the temperate zone.

Another day of steady going followed. The driven snow had one good effect ; it had filled up many of the inequalities in the ice, and thus the sledges were enabled to proceed at a quicker pace. It was on this day that the explorers had another marvel presented to them. Shortly before they halted for the night Harold lifted his eyes to the east, and gave a loud yell of amazement. There was every cause, for there, apparently within a mile of them, was a procession of shadowy forms ; men and dogs, evidently, but such men and such dogs ! The men seemed to stand at least fifty feet high, the dogs were like elephants. Accompanying them were some unnameable monsters ; gigantic things like moving mountains, except that from the head of each projected giant trees. Harold was seated on a

sledge at this time; quick to scent danger he reached round and secured his rifle.

"Father!" he cried sharply. The sledge bearing Mr. Latimer was well on ahead; the explorer did not hear. Harold looked at his rifle to see if the cartridges were ready; then he raised the piece to his shoulder, ready for anything. There was a loud yell of laughter from Nagathchook, who was driving the sledge; and as Harold turned angrily he saw a wide grin on the Eskimo's mouth.

"It no wrong," said the little man, and when Harold turned again to look at the mighty vision he was confronted by a wavering mass of shadow only, which slowly dispersed, leaving clear air.

"Well, I'm blowed," he said, and ordered Nagathchook to drive on swiftly. When he drew alongside his father he spoke of the occurrence, and Mr. Latimer explained laughingly that what he had seen was but an atmospheric phenomenon, a mirage, common enough in those high altitudes where the sun is very low in the heavens. The giant men had been the stolid Eskimos, the elephants were the sledge dogs, and the moving hills with trees growing from their heads, the surviving reindeer.

On again now. On and ever on, across the plains of monotonous white. They had almost forgotten the sounds of their own voices by this time; they dared not speak in the open for fear that their lips would freeze. The conditions were growing worse every hour. Thirty minutes

after Harold had seen the mirage, one of the reindeer staggered in its stride, stumbled heavily and fell. When they got to it it was breathing its last ; there was nothing to do save draw a knife across its throat and give it to the ravenous dogs.

When they camped that night they calculated that they had made close on twenty-five miles, and were therefore only one hundred and eighty-five miles from the Pole.

But they were paying a terrible price for their work. Their faces were frightful to behold—blue and livid ; icicles hung from their eyebrows, from their noses, from everywhere where an icicle could hang. When the sledges came to a stop they could only roll down from them and lie in the snow for long minutes until they had recovered sufficient energy to creep under cover of stacked sledges, where they crouched until the Eskimos had built rough *igloos*, hardly any use as protection against the weather. But their courage flamed high, and after a meal they were ready to proceed again.

After this the days seemed to pass like the visions of a nightmare. Each was almost exactly like the other. They aroused from deep sleep, and shiveringly ate a meal ; they prepared the sledges and went forward, hardly speaking, with set lips and burning eyes, desperate men who preferred death to failure. It was magnificent endurance, but the question was, how long could it last ?

They met howling blizzards that kept them motionless for hours at a time, when all they could

do was to creep wearily under the shelter of the sledges, draw close together to keep out the bitter cold, gather the dogs around them in a wriggling heap, and doze and sleep until better things came their way. It was all inexpressibly dreary; but the spirit that had led them forth kept them bravely up, and their only complaint was that they were unable to go forward at the speed they would have wished.

The last of the reindeer were killed, part-eaten, and the rest of the flesh piled on the depleted sledges. They had only the dogs to rely on now; but so far the dogs were behaving remarkably well. To be sure, they had not been called upon to do very much as yet; the reindeer had borne the greater stress; but the dogs showed themselves willing to go forward so long as there was a single man to drive them; and go forward they did.

At last there came a day of grey mist and blinding snow, when the sky above was dark with threat, and the ice creaked and groaned beneath their feet fearfully. Noon came round, and the party halted. It was a much-depleted party at this stage. There were only five sledges, each one drawn by six dogs. Two of the dogs had died, and since flesh was too precious to be wasted, their carcasses had been given to their living brethren; though Monro, who loved the brutes, one and all, could not bear to stand and watch the ensuing scramble. Mr. Latimer rose heavily from his seat in his sledge, and

fumbled about in the box in which he kept his instruments carefully packed in fur. He drew out his sextant and glanced anxiously at the sky to the south. There was a thinning patch in the greyness; it seemed as if the sun were about to break through. The line of the southern horizon was clearly marked. Almost breathless with expectancy, the explorer waited and waited, one eye on the open chronometer beside him, the other on the thinning patch of cloud. There was a bright flash, the thickness parted for an infinitesimal fraction of a second, but it was enough. Up went the sextant, the sun was brought down to the horizon, and the altitude was read off carefully. Then, with a pointed stick, Mr. Latimer scratched rude figures in the snow. The boys had flown to his side; they watched him with eager eyes. A few more figures and the explorer drew himself up.

"We have come farther than any human being has ever come," he said proudly. "We are in $88^{\circ} 25'$ North latitude—ninety-five miles from the Pole!"

The two lads gave vent to a croaking cheer.

They would have flung their caps into the air, but they could not: the caps were frozen to their faces by their solidified breath. But they contrived to dance a wild double-shuffle up there in the Arctic fastnesses, and they clapped each other heavily on the back. They had done what no man had ever done before—they had penetrated to within less than a hundred miles of the Pole!

CHAPTER XIX

CHECKED

THEY ate a meal, ate it with good appetites, and chatted together happily, for it seemed to them sitting there that success was actually within their grasp. Had they known, all that they had as yet endured was as nothing to what still faced them; but fortunately for them, the future remained hidden in obscurity. They pressed forward again, with cheerful smiles for each other, with hearty words of encouragement for the dogs; and the miles slowly slipped away behind them. Less than a hundred miles from the Pole! It was enough to cheer on the faintest hearts, and these were stout-hearted heroes.

Ever onward now. They climbed down from the lessening loads on the sledges when the cold grew too intense to allow them to sit still, and trudged along stubbornly beside their vehicles, encouraging the dogs by whip and voice, until their blood was once more circulating freely. Then it was mount and away, to the accompaniment of dull whip-cracks, with the gallant animals straining at the traces, away and away, the runners yelling over the frozen snow, until again the cold shut down on them and drove them to exercise once more. That night

they camped in $88^{\circ} 34'$ N. latitude, eighty-six miles from the Pole!

"We should be able to get there now within a week if all goes well," said Mr. Latimer. "Think of it, lads; only one little week—perhaps less. The further north we go the easier it seems. I often imagined that once this outside barrier of broken ice was passed we should find smooth going."

And his words seemed true. For the last two days they had been journeying over ice that was almost as smooth as some ancient glacier, underneath the thin covering of snow. And they had met with practically no open water—nothing, that is, that could not be skirted. They had seen none of the immense fissures they had feared to meet—fissures that must inevitably have held them back hopelessly. If only the cold had not been so intense the travelling would have been almost pleasant; but by this time the temperature was down to sixty-five below zero Fahrenheit, and the harsh wind seemed to penetrate to the very marrow of their bones. All the furs and woollens in the world would not have kept out that bitter frigidity; all they could do was to restore the checked circulation by means of violent exercise, and pray for a lull in the gales.

"We can't fail now," said Mr. Latimer. "We should be cowards and poltroons to turn our backs on the Pole when it is practically within sight."

"Never a fail," said Monro cheerfully, sewing away diligently at a big rent in the fur pants which he wore over his ordinary clothing. He had slipped upon a jagged piece of ice less than an hour before. "We aren't the sort of men to fail, come to think of it, uncle."

"One of us is going to reach the Pole, even if we can't all three do it," said Harold. "But if we can all three get there, so much the better."

It was a fine spirit; it seemed that failure would not be allowed to come their way. They conversed together for a little while; then sleep overpowered them, silence descended on the *igloo*, silence that was punctuated only by an ever-increasing groaning sound. Presently the groaning grew into distinct clashings; the ice beneath them shook convulsively, but they took no notice. They were reaping the reward of their exertions; they slept on serenely.

Morning showed them a clear sky, pale greenish blue, out of which a strong wind roared without a moment's pause. As they breakfasted they felt again that sharp heaving of the solid ice, and Mr. Latimer's face grew anxious in the extreme.

"I hope the ice is not breaking up," he said. "That would settle our hash for us once for all. I have had fears that our good fortune was lasting too long—it is about time for a change now. There must be some motion in the ice; and if that motion grows we shall find yawning stretches of water where we cannot hope to cross at all."

When breakfast was over and they evacuated their *igloo*, they found the Eskimos gathered about the entrance. The dogs were lying around on the ice, apparently careless of what happened. It was Nagathhook, the chief, who took up the tale.

"These fellows say it no good to go on any more," he said slowly. "This break-up of ice. We know. Bimeby only water; no more ice. They say they no go on more."

"Of course they'll go on," said the explorer sharply. "They'll die if they don't. They must go on."

Nagathhook consulted hurriedly with the others; they shook their heads slowly from side to side, and pointed to the ice under their feet, which was already rolling and heaving like billows.

"They say they sooner die," said the chief. "Our god he is angry. No man come here before; no man must come. Listen; the god is speaking."

He had changed from broken English to fluent Eskimo, and began to pour out a stream of words which the boys could not follow. Mr. Latimer heard him to the end in patience. Then he turned to the boys.

"He says that the voice of their god has been heard before, long ago, when white men came up near here, and the white men were never seen again. He reckons it's a warning to us that we've gone far enough."

"We haven't gone far enough until we've

got to the Pole," said Harold bravely, and Monro, falling into American slang, ejaculated :

"Say, I should rise to remark."

Nagathchook harangued his men again ; they refused to proceed. Mr. Latimer did his best.

"There will be much reward for every man—knives, guns, and beads," he said encouragingly. "Plenty of treasure, and more beads for every mile we go."

The face of the chief brightened at this, but those of his followers were still dark.

"Well, we can't stand here all day," said Latimer impatiently. "If you won't come on with us we'll leave you behind."

He strode towards his sledge ; but three of the Eskimos stood in front of him, barring the way. They were like impassive lumps of flesh, but their eyes glittered strangely.

"Out of the way," said Mr. Latimer harshly, and as he spoke the three men flung themselves on him like wolves. But they had met their match in that hardy man. Like lightning, his fist shot out and one fell with a thud, half insensible from a blow between the eyes. Once again did the explorer strike ; another man reeled back ; but there came the evil glitter of a knife, and the remaining man darted in with murder in his eyes. Mr. Latimer attempted to parry the thrust ; he fell on one knee, and as he did so his son rushed forward to help him. The knife flashed ; it did not fall, for the lad was clinging to the would-be murderer like a tiger

cat, pounding at his face with one hand, wrenching at the hand that held the knife with the other. Mr. Latimer dashed into the *mêlée*, and dragged his son away. Then a revolver muzzle was crammed into the Eskimo's face; he recoiled, for his eyes showed him that Latimer's finger was pressing on the trigger.

"Drop that!"

The knife fell softly to the snow. The man slowly put his hands over his face, and muttered something unintelligible. It was plain that he expected nothing but instantaneous death. Mr. Latimer set his foot on the knife and ground it into the snow. The two he had knocked down scrambled to their feet and stood a little way off, breathing heavily. And then the explorer spoke.

"I'll have no mutineers with me. Who is on my side?"

The two lads ranged themselves beside him, their hands on their pistol butts. Presently Nagathchook waddled forward.

"Me too," he said waveringly, unable to meet the eyes of his fellows. "These men say you have angered their god; they sacrifice you. I not let them now. I Klistian."

"No tricks, mind!" said Mr. Latimer sternly. "I won't stand nonsense. If there's any more knife-work it will be pistols for me. Well, who else comes?"

No one moved; the group of four was not enlarged by a single man. Mr. Latimer waited for a little while; then he turned abruptly round.

"We'll go on by ourselves. Let these cowards stay here if they must. But if I come back and find so much as a single thing touched in those sledges, let them look out. My spirit will haunt them always."

He spoke in Eskimo, a language he understood thoroughly. And his quiet bluff told. The natives went a curious greyish white under the yellow of their skins; they shuffled uneasily; it was plain that to their superstitious minds the possibility of the explorer's spirit haunting them was quite feasible. Mr. Latimer knew enough to prey upon their fears in this way, but try as he would he could not get them to move a step farther north.

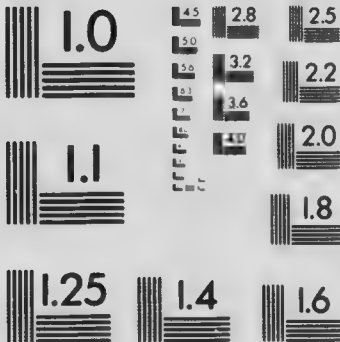
"Very good; we'll start," he said quietly. "Nagathhook, there will be a big reward for you for this. Now, boys, we've got to move lively. There will be fewer of us to feed—that's one comfort. Two sledges will be enough for us now—take ten dogs to a sledge. Monro, you drive one, Nagathhook another, Harold and I will take turns with you."

The rearrangement was swiftly made. The two fullest sledges were set in order, the dogs were harnessed; and without a word spoken to the rest of the party, the forlorn hope moved away from the encampment. After half an hour's journeying Mr. Latimer looked back. The Eskimos were still standing as he had left them, their shadows stretched out before them towards the north.



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"After all," said the explorer, "you can't blame them unduly. They see in this upheaval of the ice a warning against our impious intrusion. We see only a natural phenomenon, and we are not afraid to go forward, therefore we must not be too severe. We must rely on each other absolutely now, and—when you come to think of it, it will be an added honour—only white men now will reach the Pole."

If anything, they made swifter progress now. There was no need to wait for the laggard packs; Nagathchook was an expert driver, and Monro was in his element. But as they went on, the sledges bumping and clattering over the uneven surface of the ice, the groaning and crashing grew louder and louder. The wind was rising; fortunately for them, the snow had left off, and though the cold was frightfully intense it was still just possible to bear it. Noon came; an observation told them they were less than eighty miles from the North Pole, and the travelling was still comparatively easy. Perhaps it was that they were getting used to it, perhaps the conviction of success buoyed them up so that they were not alive to the difficulties that encountered them every inch of the way.

A vast barren desert of ice—that was their position now. Nothing but themselves seemed to live; it seemed likely that even the under-water itself sustained no life. Desolation and death wherever they looked; a horrible, overpowering sense of loneliness and misery everywhere.

Gradually, as they progressed still farther, the sky became furiously overcast, black clouds swept across it at incredible speed. They poured in a living stream from the north-west; they enveloped the day and made it almost night. It was as if the very sun refused to aid the travellers longer; and yet they persevered. The grinding of the ice now grew so deafening that the shrieking of the wind was silence by comparison. Mr. Latimer halted his sledge several times, alighted stiffly, and bent down, with his ear close to the heaving floor. Every time he rose from such an examination, his face, what could be seen of it, was graver and graver; but whatever his fears were he did not voice them. Instead, he sprang to the sledge and urged the dogs forward; and be sure that, wherever he went, the second sledge, containing the two lads, followed as the back wheel of a bicycle follows the front.

All suddenly the explorer gave a shrill cry, and held up his hand. Monro yelled to his dogs; the well-trained beasts stopped dead in their tracks, quivering in every limb.

"Stand by—there's something happening!" said the explorer alarmedly. "Listen, boys!"

They listened, with cold fear gnawing at their hearts. The grinding of the ice was terrific. It was like a railway train thundering through a tunnel, like the roar of heaven's artillery; and under the groaning was a dull, monotonous scream. Nagathchook threw himself on his knees and

covered his face ; the others held their breath in the darkness, momentarily expecting the ice to break asunder beneath them and precipitate them headlong to a horrid death. And yet the boys were not able to think of death ; they thought, instead, of the most inconsequent things. Harold was wondering what would become of his mother if they never returned ; Monrow was wishing that he had had a chance to know the truth about the second mate's villainy. The darkness grew more profound than ever ; it pressed down upon them like something solid, obscuring their minds, depressing them. They felt a mad impulse to throw themselves face-down on the ice and there cower like frightened sheep, but their manhood restrained them. They closed their eyes, for they were smarting with the awful gloom.

"Look !" shrieked Mr. Latimer suddenly, and they looked. To the immediate north the pall of cloud had broken away, and a strange livid light was showing. It was like the phosphorescent glow that had gleamed at the entrance to the submarine cavern, only a hundred times brighter. But they had only a glance to spare for the strange sight ; there was something else that demanded their attention. The ice in front of them was breaking up into floes. A great patch of open water showed plainly ; it was as black as the mouth of the Pit ; and on its surface was a strange spray, also black. It was indescribably awful, and for one minute it seemed

to the three explorers as if the end of the world had come. Mr. Latimer gave a sharp sob, climbed down from his sledge, and stumbled forward a little way. The dogs were lying down in their harness, afraid to move, too much afraid even to whimper. Forward crept Mr. Latimer, until he stood on the brink of an ice-bound river. Right in front of him, reaching far away on either hand, was a wide stretch of water; still black, still covered with that strange dark spray. The explorer turned his face to the lads.

"We can't go on," he said simply. "We can never cross that fissure." And he thought to himself that he had failed, and that he was a doubly-ruined man.

CHAPTER XX

THE TERRIBLE ARCTIC SNOW-SLEEP

LITTLE by little the cloudy sky cleared, and the livid brightness grew to show them the full hopelessness of their position. The great fissure seemed if anything to be widening ; the water was lashed into awful fury by the wind ; little wisps of spray flew into their faces as they halted almost on the very brink. No, there was no going forward yet. Perhaps it would be possible to make a big detour and pass the fissure, but on the other hand such an attempt might easily be hopeless. They stared at one another with hopeless faces, and Harold, who knew how much his father depended on the success of this expedition, gave a sharp, loud sob. It was not fear or pain ; it was sheer sympathy with, and misery for, another's sorrow.

For a long time they stood thus ; and then, all suddenly, Monro pricked up his ears. "Look !" he cried. They looked, and started back in amazement. Down the fissure was coming a large floe of loose ice, a huge raft rushing on at a vast speed. They watched it breathlessly, hopelessly ; and Mr. Latimer wondered if it would charge in at their feet, shatter their foothold, and precipitate them all into the boiling

horror of the water. But Monro was studying the approach with half-parted lips, a curious expression in his eyes. Still nearer came the giant floe; gliding along smoothly over the tortured water. Nearer still; and Monro gathered up the lines. A sharp word, and the dogs were on their feet, Loot-chik-na first as ever. The floe was almost abreast; a sudden twisting current drove it towards the spot where they stood.

"Now!" yelled the lad, eyeing the proceedings with keen glances. "Up you get, Uncle Harry. Come on, Nagathchook." And before Mr. Latimer knew what was afoot he found himself clinging to the back of the sledge, which Monro was urging forward at top speed. There was a wild moment of suspense, the dogs seemed to hesitate, then Monro's whip shot out like a thong of fire. With a yelp and a scramble the dogs charged forward—there was a jolt and a heave that threatened to capsize the sledge; a sickening shudder; Harold closed his eyes. When he opened them again the ice seemed to be whirling past him with inconceivable velocity. The sledge rocked uneasily; Harold looked round him. His father was still clinging to the back of the sledge; his face was white and set, but in his eyes was the dawning of a great understanding. Monro was bent forward, his mouth shut now, his eyes glittering. The lad had seized the moment when the floe, driven by some submarine current, had touched the parent ice; he had urged his dogs

forward, risking everything, and now he and his companions were afloat on the racing floe. But not for long. Their position was extremely perilous, more perilous now than ever, perhaps, for the floe was composed of old ice that might crack and break at any minute. Indeed, it was already drooping towards the wide part where the sledge—suddenly checked—was standing, and Monro called to the dogs. They drew their burden to the middle of the floe and stood there shivering, looking round at their driver with unbelieving eyes, as if wondering what they had done to bring this grim fate upon their heads.

"It was bravely done, my boy—but I fear it is hopeless," gasped Mr. Latimer. Monro answered never a word; he was watching the floe. It seemed to be leaping out across the waste of water towards the north; if it went much further it must touch the remoter ice. Mr. Latimer stood up and peered ahead—his face brightened once more. The floe swept on, a floating island in a sea of dread—but now none had time for fear. All thoughts were concentrated on what the future held; and it seemed as if that future might hold promise. For the floe was surely approaching the northern ice—yes; they could see it plainly now. Unless some cross current intervened, unless the rushing wind held them back, unless the jealous ice-gods reached out their hands and thrust them to the spot whence they had come—"Hoop-la! Moosh!" yelled Monro, and the dogs fled forward as if

flying from death. Another repetition of the sickening jolting; another tense minute whilst they clung to the sledge for their very lives; a dashing heaving tumult, in which it was impossible to think, impossible to breathe, impossible to do anything save only to hold on blindly, and then—a sudden cessation of the movement, a smooth run forward, and the sledge was over on sound ice once more.

"Thank God, and a brave lad," said Mr. Latimer fervently, passing his gloved hand across his forehead. Harold had nothing to say; he was clinging, half-insensible, to the sledge, wondering how he had contrived to live through those awful minutes. And Monro—once the strain was over—drooped forward slowly, his head sank between his knees, he gave a low groan, and tumbled sideways off. He had swooned dead away after doing a thing that few grown men would have attempted.

Nagathchook was left behind. He had not had the nerve to face that awful ferry. They could only hope that he would find his way back to his fellows to await the explorers' return. Whatever they did now they must do alone. There were three men of Anglo-Saxon blood, ten dogs and one sledge, and the whole made but an infinitesimal speck in that mighty world of dreary desolation. But that Anglo-Saxon blood was still hot with purpose, and presently Monro was revived. They drew him under the lee of the sledge and rubbed his hands and face, they forced a drop

of spirit between his clenched teeth ; Loot-chik-na urged his way between the two ministers and added the caress of his warm tongue ; and swiftly enough the lad sat up. His first words were characteristic.

"We seem to be wasting an almighty lot of time, Uncle Harry," he said. "Let's get moving."

But it was easier said than done now. The brightness that had illumined the northern sky had disappeared ; growing darkness obscured the heavens ; the wind was howling and screaming with maniac force. A terrible day, indeed ! A day to make the bravest shiver to the core of his heart—to make even desperate men think fearfully of what the night might bring. But they struggled forward still, as soon as it was deemed possible to move. Monro climbed once more to the top of the loaded sledge ; his two companions took hold of the rawhide thongs that hung from the lashings, and, with heads bent to meet the snow and wind, they trudged forward. There was no swift dashing now—it was a mere creep. Every foot was won at the price of desperate endeavour ; many a time they were compelled to lay all their weight to the sledge and assist the struggling dogs by the active exertion of their own muscles.

It became a nightmare of struggling ; they said under their breaths that they could not hold out another yard, and yet they won another fathom and still went on. They walked like

men in dreamland, every sense numbed, every muscle protesting; and ever their gallant hearts proved superior to mere bodily fatigue, and still they went on.

So two hours passed, and they calculated that they had covered another two miles in the direction of the Pole. It was cruel going, but it was advancement; and now every furlong counted. As they halted for a much-needed rest, one of the dogs lay down in the traces and quietly died. It made no protest; it did not turn condemning eyes on those who had driven it to its death; it simply stretched itself out with a long-drawn sigh and died, a humble martyr to duty. It was one of the dogs that had been poisoned and had recovered under the skilful treatment of Dr. Vyner and Monro; the poison had weakened it, and now the weakness told.

They left it where it lay, and plunged on again. Always onward! It appeared to Harold that even if they died their feet must necessarily carry them Pole-wards, for their spirits refused to admit defeat. The cold, cruel wind stifled them; it sapped away their vitality in huge waves; but they called upon the hidden resources of the spirit which are stronger far than flesh and blood, and went on.

"Stop, boys!" Mr. Latimer panted out the order, and reeled where he stood. The dogs were halted; the boys busied themselves with preparations for the night. There was but little to do. It was out of the question to attempt to

build *igloos*; but on the sledge they carried a small tent of deerhide, with a few iron rods. They drove the pointed ends of these rods into the ice, draped the deerskin over them, anchored the erection to occasional boulders of loose ice by means of rawhide ropes, and, warmed a little by their exertions, took wooden shovels and threw a pile of snow up, digging downwards all the time, until there was some sort of a rough shelter for the dogs. The dogs were their first consideration, for on the lives of these faithful brutes depended the welfare of all.

"We'll need all our food," said Harold, as he lifted a bale of pemmican from the sledge, and noticed that one other only remained.

"Nagathchook had the most food on his sledge," said Mr. Latimer in a hollow voice. "This contains principally the instruments and the records."

"We shall have to spare something for the dogs," said Monro. "We must keep *them* fit."

They took minute shares of food themselves, sacrificing their own welfare to that of their animals. They made up for the lack of meat with biscuit—there was not much of it, alas! and when they had eaten their hasty meal, when they had brewed a tinful of cocoa over a small spirit-lamp, they found the dogs had been gnawing at the harness, much of which had been destroyed. They were craving for sleep and rest, but before they thought of taking anything of the kind they set to and repaired the gnawed traces. It was

rough labour, almost laughably coarse, but it seemed efficacious.

Another awful day of struggling followed. They struck camp at an early hour, because once they did awaken they were so stiff and miserable that only active motion could buoy them up to the necessary pitch for further journeying. The dogs seemed fit as yet ; but at the end of this new day one of the brutes walked staggeringly, and whined whenever its feet touched the rough ice.

"It will only be a drag on us, and anyhow—the dogs must be fed," said Mr. Latimer. "I'm sorry, boys, for I know you're fond of them ; but—we may have to eat them ourselves before we've done—if they don't eat us."

With stiff fingers he reached for his rifle, where it lay on the sledge. The lashings were frozen stiff ; it was a matter of some difficulty to get the weapon clear ; but at last it was ready. The sound of the ensuing report sounded dully in the wilderness ; and—the dogs were fed, though Monro turned away with a gulp in his throat. It could not be helped ; their lives depended on such seeming cruelty. That night they tasted the bitterness of death, crouched there in the little tent, sharing one common sleeping bag for the sake of warmth ; and, even so, hardly able to endure the biting agonies in their chests.

Another insufficient meal, another gearing up of the dogs, another start, again in driving

snow, though the wind seemed to have lessened somewhat. They could hardly see a hundred yards ahead of them, and what they could see was only snow-covered ice and desolation. No life of any kind—nature seemed aghast at the immensity of that barren portion of the world's surface.

Towards noon they halted, unable to go further. The dogs were worn out, Monro was called upon to use the whip with greater frequency, and though the dogs responded to the appeal of the hissing lash, they flagged and fell back after each trivial spurt. And the cold steadily grew more intense. Mr. Latimer dragged himself wearily to the sledge and possessed himself of his sextant. Then he crouched up under the lee of the packed vehicle, and waited—waited. It is often the case that a blinding gale will clear about noon when the sun reaches its greatest height; and the explorer was hoping still. A faint gleam showed through the driving whiteness at length; up went the sextant; a long minute of expectation, a brilliant flare of light, and Mr. Latimer laid down his sextant with an exclamation of pleasure. Harold and Monro cleared a smooth patch in the snow, and their senior worked carefully with a pointed stick, which he was compelled to use with both hands, and even then the figures he made were almost indecipherable. But he had committed the necessary calculations to memory, and after a while he gave a faint cry of content.

"89° 10' N. latitude," he croaked. "We're within fifty miles of the Pole."

They had penetrated to within the eighty-ninth parallel of latitude, and two days of hard travelling would bring them to their goal. The news acted on all three like a tonic; they gathered themselves together and fell on the scanty meal that was possible with new zest. Only fifty miles to go! No one thought of the return; all eyes stared forward to the north. The Pole was almost in sight; and if only this snow would clear——

As if in answer to their wishes the snow did cease; but though at first they blessed the providential occurrence, a little later they wished the snow had held. For the sun shone so brightly on the ice that even with their eyes protected by snow-glasses the glare was most agonising. It was like staring into the eye of the summer sun; it made their heads ache so excruciatingly that they could not lift them. But they went on, because to go on had become a habit with them. Progress became slower and slower as the hours dragged by. The ground was getting uneven once more; the ice was piled in vast hummocks, and at about three o'clock they came to a sudden halt. Ahead of them was a steep range of ice-hills, and it seemed as if their over-tried hearts must break supposing they attempted the ascent.

"We must drive to the west, and see if we cannot get round," said Mr. Latimer desperately. "Boys, we can't turn back now."

The dogs were turned and urged forward; they went laggingly. The progress had degenerated to a mere crawl, human and canine endurance was strained to breaking point. So they crawled until it was impossible to take a single step further; and there they camped again, where they had stopped exhausted. A still more fragmentary meal; and they needed all the food they could get to combat the cold. Monroe read the thermometer and found it registered seventy-five degrees below zero Fahrenheit; it seemed incredible that human beings could endure such cold; but they did. Another dog was shot, and its companions were fed. But there were now no protests from the boys; they were too worn out to do more than eat the fragments of biscuit and pemmican, crawl into the sleeping bag, and huddle close together. And yet, it was a magnificent example of British and American pluck. They never thought of turning back; they had made up their minds to go forward as long as was possible, and then—they would lie down and die, conscious of failure, perhaps, but of such a glorious failure as made most successes seem insignificant.

“Try again, boys.”

It was Mr. Latimer's voice breaking in upon their unconsciousness. Wearily they arose to their feet and set about their simple preparations, moving listlessly like shadows in a world of shadows. Two of the dogs betrayed signs of weakness; Mr. Latimer hesitated long, wonder-

ing whether they should be destroyed and given to their stronger fellows, to provide them sufficient stamina to attempt one mighty dash ; but the dogs were allowed to live, for the explorer knew that each animal now counted incalculably valuable.

On again, steering almost due west now, endeavouring to circle round that implacable ice-barrier. They paused whenever the summits of the hills grew lower ; but the steeply sloping sides forbade any attempt at ascent ; they could only groan and drive on. The dogs were worn out before they had gone three miles ; but they set their shoulders to the sledge and forced it forward ; and Loot-chik-na, who had kept his great strength marvellously, yelped encouragingly to his wild companions. On and on. Nothing should stay them ; they refused to calculate their chances of failure. Somewhere or other, they felt, this barrier must cease, leaving a way open to the Pole, but as yet that way did not show. Another meal, another crawling forward—a sudden shout from Mr. Latimer. They had reached the end of the hills ; before their gaze stretched an open ice-plain, almost as smooth as glass. This was the last lap ; and if only the conditions remained as they were they would succeed in their quest.

They had lost all count of time by now. They hardly knew the difference between night and day—except that at one period of the twenty-four hours the sun was behind them, and at

another it was ahead. They crept forward, footstep by footstep, their feet aching, blood frozen in their shoes. They suffered agonising tortures, for the slightest wound became a ghastly horror in a few hours; and the pain weakened them. Added to this was the lack of sufficient food; and yet not a single dissentient voice was raised. The Pole must be reached, no matter what happened afterwards.

That night they halted under a clear sky and brilliant light, on smooth ice. Mr. Latimer reviewed the situation carefully. He made an exhaustive survey of their provisions, and found there was sufficient to last them with care for another week. But it meant scrappy meals, hardly sufficient to keep life in their bodies. And he came to a sudden decision.

"We need strength for the final dash," he said. "We will make a good meal now. Never mind what happens afterwards; we will eat."

So they ate to repletion, consuming two full days' food at once. The dogs were allowed to eat sparingly; but next morning one other was shot and his carcass given to the remainder. And when the unpleasant work was over the three explorers tightened their belts, and fixed their eyes on a spot due north.

For a few miles they went along at a good pace, cheered beyond measure by the prospects of victory. The sky was still clear; but there was a rumbling mutter overhead, and that same moaning that had characterised the lower

latitudes. Mr. Latimer examined the barometer thoughtfully, and inwardly groaned at the evidence written there. It was making up for another gale. That gale broke on them within an hour, driving furiously from the north-west, bringing clouds of snow with it. Still they went on, steering a true northerly course. The cold increased, the dogs stopped, they were flogged forward dully by Monro, but gradually the lad's head sank to his breast; it became more and more of an effort to lift his hand; the whip fell at last to the ice, and was neglected. Monro slept heavily.

Harold Latimer, who had been pushing doggedly at the rear of the sledge, roused himself from the growing dullness that was creeping over him. What had happened? The sledge had stopped; the dogs were cowering down in a circle, snapping angrily at one another; Lootchik-na was baring his great fangs as if about to find himself a meal. Without sparing a thought to the dogs, Harold put his hand on Monro's shoulder and shook him hard. He met with no response. At once fear crept into the boy's soul; he gave an inarticulate cry and clambered to his cousin's side. Monro was unconscious, fast asleep, breathing stertorously. It was a moment of agonising horror for the English lad. His own senses were steeped in stupor; but he called upon some marvellous reserve of courage, and pulled his cousin down to the lee side of the suddenly-stopped sledge. Then he

FIRST AT THE POLE

turned to his father. Mr. Latimer was hanging to the side of the sledge; one mittened hand thrust under the lashings. But for that the explorer must have been left behind long before; for he was quite unconscious. His head had fallen forward; icicles hung over his face; the snow had crusted on his back. He looked hardly human, for his face was horribly blue except for one or two white patches. Harold lost no time. He half lifted, half dragged his father and laid him down carefully beside Monro. Then he contrived to cast loose the lashings of the sledge and dragged out the big fur sleeping-bag; this he hauled over the unconscious men's feet, and brought it up about their necks. So far so good. The next work was not so easy. He did it however, because he knew it was that or death. He drove the remaining dogs into a lump close around the sleeping-bag, crowding them in, keeping them there by sheer will-power. The fragmentary heat from their bodies might help in the good work.

Next he found the brandy bottle, and after chafing the necks and faces of his companions, he poured a drop of the spirit between their fast shut teeth. The liquid ran out sideways, and Harold thought they must be dead; but he persevered doggedly, and presently a drop went down Mr. Latimer's throat and another followed it. But neither of the two unconscious men showed signs of life; Harold felt the greatest fear he had ever known. He knew that

mind must snap under the weight of loneliness unless something happened. His brain was growing more and more somnolent; he had to stop deliberately and force himself to think before moving a finger, and even then he found himself doing things that he had had no intention of doing.

"I must—get—them—back—to—life," he muttered drowsily, and with the words on his lips he pitched forward on top of the sleeping bag and lay there like a corpse. The driving snow fell thickly.

CHAPTER XXI

NINETY DEGREES NORTH LATITUDE

"WELL, this just about beats Boston! Say what d'you make of this now?" The words were spoken in a hearty American voice; and the man who had spoken them jumped from a sledge which had stopped, and surveyed a curiously shaped pile of snow. From one corner of the pile projected the runners of a sledge, but beyond that was nothing save the uneven whiteness.

"Looks remarkably like a stranded expedition," continued the new arrival. "Seems I'm not the first on this game, after all. Well, when in doubt, explore, that's always been my motto. Get a shovel there, and do something for your living. Great Scott, but this is the strangest thing I've discovered yet, and I've done a lot of discovering in my life, too."

Whilst he talked he worked, snatching a shovel from the hands of the wondering Eskimo who accompanied him, and falling on the gathering snow like a madman. Presently there was a yelp, and he drew back as the snow was thrown aside and a huge husky leaped out into the open with its fangs bared and its hair bristling.

"Guess you must be the watch-dog," said

the American coolly. "Give him a feed, you."

Another sledge had halted near by, driven by another Eskimo. This latter personage at once threw aside the covering of his load and dragged out a slab of dried salmon, which he threw to the dog. It fell upon it growling, but before it had torn off a single fragment it picked the food up in its mouth and forced its way into the interior of the snow-heap. By this time the American had found his way inside also, and was standing in amazement at the sight there disclosed. A natural snow-hut had been formed under the lee of a large sledge. The interior was very small; in fact it looked as if the snow had covered up everything, and that the breathing of some dogs and men had gradually melted a little cavity. There were four dogs in the place, and these moved sluggishly; but the discoverer had no eyes for them. He was looking at a curious group huddled up under the lee of the sledge. One was a man, the other two were boys. The two undermost were snugly wrapped up in a sleeping sack; but the uppermost, who lay face downward over the pair, had no such protection. In one hand he held a brandy bottle, which was empty. Beyond this nothing was to be seen. But the explorer laid his hand on each body there, with a deft touch which seemed to bespeak him as something of a doctor.

"This one's alive, anyhow," he said, speaking quickly. "Here, drag him out." And the two

Eskimos dragged out the unconscious body of Harold Latimer, the brandy bottle still clutched firmly in his stiff hand.

"Get some sort of a shelter rigged up. Guess we'll camp here for a piece."

It was done; an *igloo* was in course of construction in an incredibly short space of time, promising sure shelter for the distressed men. The big husky that had welcomed the new arrival meanwhile stood protectingly over *Monro*; it had laid the salmon down beside the lad's face, as if imploring him to arouse himself and eat.

"Blessed if I ever saw a husky like that before," said the saviour of the party. "He seems more than human. I've seen the time when I wouldn't have given up a meal for my best friend. Get out, you brute. He'll be fed in time," and he picked up the salmon and flung it behind him. As if realising that his master would be cared for *Loot-chik-na* at once fell savagely on the food, and bolted it without hesitation, and as the last mouthful disappeared *Monro* was lifted out of the little opening that had been made. *Mr. Latimer* in his turn was brought out; and at once the explorer fell to work.

"Look alive with that *igloo*," he called, and the Eskimos worked like madmen. But their leader did not wait till they were finished. Instead, he busied himself in restoring to life the three adventurers he had found; laying them out flat on the hard snow, pumping away at their

arms as if they had but newly been drawn from the deep. It was heavy work, but as he paused to feel their hearts he was aware of a distinct flutter—they were still alive. He settled down to his self-imposed task doggedly; Mr. Latimer stirred restlessly, half-opened his eyes, waved one hand impatiently, and then sank back inert. But the explorer would have none of that.

"Rouse out, comrade," he said cheerfully, and slapped the man lightly on the face, increasing his blows until Mr. Latimer again opened his eyes. "So, that's better. Now a drop of this, my friend, that's the way." He poured brandy down Mr. Latimer's throat, and then more brandy; and, leaving him for a while, devoted himself to the two boys.

"It's a most amazing occurrence," he said softly to himself as he worked on. "Well, they are—they must be mighty well-plucked out to stick it out so long as this. They seem to have got the full force of that blizzard."

One of the Eskimos here came up and said the *igloo* was ready.

"Then bear a hand to carry these inside," said the explorer, and in a little while the three were extended on the broad snow-shelf running round the erection. Here they were closely wrapped in furs, and several soap-stone lamps were set burning; pannikins were hung over them, and the temperature of the hut swiftly rose to about twenty degrees below zero, which, by contrast with the cold outside, was almost

warmth. Hot soup was prepared ; it was very weak indeed, being merely pemmican boiled in snow-water, but it served its turn. Within a couple of hours of the discovery, Mr. Latimer recovered full consciousness.

"So ; that's hearty," said the man who had saved their lives. "Now, sir, if you're able to speak, perhaps you'll tell me how you came to be in such a fix. I'm Baker—Captain Baker to be explicit—and I'm trying to find the North Pole. Yes, as you've surmised, I'm American. Whether I find it or not I've found you."

Mr. Latimer extended a feeble hand. "My name is Latimer," he said. "These two boys are my son and nephew. We got to within about forty miles of the Pole, and then—I don't know what happened. I only remember feeling a mighty sleepiness overwhelming me, and then—I awoke to find you bending over me. I think you have saved our lives."

"Well, I might have had a hand in it, but it strikes me this lad here had more to do with it than I had. I found him lying over you two, with a bottle in his hand ; you were in a sleeping bag, he wasn't. However, now we know each other we can talk more freely. So you're Latimer ? I heard about your expedition ; I felt that you were bound to succeed. I came by land as far as I could, and then just made across the ice. I'd a big party to start with, but it's only three strong now, and two are Eskimos at that. You seem to have had a hard time."

As he talked he busied himself with the two boys, and one by one they came back to life, amazed at their surroundings. As the work went forward the two elder explorers exchanged opinions and suggestions; but when all three of the rescued party were able to sit up and eat ravenously of the food Captain Baker provided, that worthy gentleman delivered himself as follows:

"Well, it's about time to reckon matters up clearly. We're all bound to the Pole; what's to be done?"

"If it had not been for your providential arrival," said Mr. Latimer, "we should have died where we were. It seems to me there is only one thing to be done—and that is that you should press forward and reach the Pole, whilst we wait for you here. You deserve all the honour that can be gained, sir."

Baker scratched his head thoughtfully. "Say, that's talking like a white man," he said at last. "I'm just tickled to death at the whole thing. But—you've done so much, sir, that you deserve to get to the Pole. It's just luck that's been against you. If your Eskimos hadn't deserted you might have been there by now. I'll tell you what—suppose we split the difference? Suppose we all go forward together? I always swore that the American flag should be first to be planted on the Pole, but I don't see any reason against planting both Old Glory and the British Jack side by side."

Only Mr. Latimer, an explorer himself, knew

the generosity that prompted the suggestion. To offer to share the wonderful honour of being first to reach the Pole was a tremendous sacrifice.

"No; I can't do that," he said brokenly. "I recognise the splendour of your offer, but—you have won where we have failed, and it would be a mean and cowardly thing to do to take advantage of your generosity. Go you on, Captain Baker, and do what you set out to do."

But the American would not hear a word on the subject. "I'd rather have a white man for my companion than Eskimos," he said. "I intend to camp here to-night, and then go forward. If you like to come with me, I'm your man."

The matter was still unsettled when the party snuggled down to sleep, after the rescued three had made an examination of their forces. They found five dogs alive, including Loot-chik-na; and there was still a small amount of food left on the sledge. Mr. Latimer sat up for a considerable time arguing with the American, but nothing much was gained. Baker was determined that they should share the glory together.

"But think what it will mean to you," said Latimer at last. "Don't you know there's a quarter of a million offered for the first man to reach the Pole?"

The American studied his face attentively. "I read of it," he said without much emotion. "But then it doesn't——" And all suddenly he checked some words he was about to speak.

A curious smile lit up his face. "Well, we can talk it over in the morning," he said. "Although there won't be any morning." And presently all four of the inmates of the *igloo* were asleep.

"Come on, Latimer. Don't hold back at the last. You've got to go."

Mr. Latimer hesitated. He was feeling well again, and the boys were as fit as ever after their terrible experience. The temptation to go forward was very strong; and the faces of the boys expressed the utmost eagerness.

"Very well, I will come with you," he said at last, and so the start was decided upon.

The weather had cleared up wonderfully; the wind had dropped almost to a flat calm. It was as if nature, disgusted at the defiance of these men, had withdrawn her forces from the contest in sheer impotence. Away to the north the smooth ice showed in an unbroken plain; a bright sun shone in the sky, it was as promising a Polar day as ever man could wish to see. The spirits of all the party had risen; in spite of the gnawing sense of failure that obsessed Mr. Latimer he resolutely set about the simple preparations. There was not much to be done. The sledge belonging to the party from the *Enterprise* was unpacked, everything that could possibly be spared was cached, and with a trivial load, containing only sufficient food to last them four days, instruments and certain cylinders and flags, the sledge was ready. The five surviving dogs were geared

into position, and after a scanty feed from Captain Baker's stock of dried salmon, all was ready. Before they left Latimer and Baker took a series of exhaustive observations, which proved that they were within thirty-nine miles of the Pole.

"We can do it in two days, if we hurry," said Baker, and the expedition set out bravely.

For several hours they went forward, attaining what was actually an almost incredible speed, for the weight of the sledges was as nothing on that smooth surface. They did not talk much; they saved their breath for the work; afterwards they would be able to discuss the matter in all its bearings. With success so near a spirit of optimism inspired all hands; even the stolid Eskimos began to glow at the eyes, and to chatter together animatedly. So the day passed, and when they halted finally, their observations showed them to be less than nineteen miles from the Pole.

"Our best plan would be to press on a little further to-night, and then finish the business to-morrow in one dash," said Baker.

This plan was agreed to; they refreshed themselves and started again, ploughing forward for another three hours, by which time they were no more than fifteen miles from their goal.

A sudden snow-storm whirled down upon them. Captain Baker was tramping along in the lead over the smooth ice. Mr. Latimer was slightly behind, near his own sledge, which Monro still drove. For a moment or two the

entire outlook was shut out completely ; and quite suddenly there came a little cry from ahead. In the clamour of the storm it was almost unheard, but Mr. Latimer's ears were preternaturally quickened by what he had gone through, and despite the thick fur hood he wore he heard the cry. He stopped suddenly, and yelled to Monro to stop the dogs ; then, treading cautiously, he went forward. It was as well that he had stopped when he did. Barely a dozen yards ahead of his stopping place yawned a great fissure—it seemed to reach right down through the thick ice to the sea beneath. Mr. Latimer's heart stood still. Where was Baker ? He must have fallen down the crevasse—there was no other explanation of that cry. And if so—it must be admitted that for a single moment a hideous temptation assailed the Englishman. If his rival had fallen down there he must be dead—drowned and frozen in the sea beneath. And so the way was open for him. He would, after all, be first to reach the Pole ; and the honour and fortune would be his. His mind was weakened a little by the privations he had endured ; normally he would have sooner shot himself than allowed such a hideous suggestion to enter his thoughts. Almost as soon as the temptation was born it was thrust aside. If Baker had fallen down that crevasse he, Latimer, must do all that a man could do to save him. Not until he was quite certain that the American was dead might he advance another step.

"Look alive, boys. Get the harness off the dogs; get the sledge-lashings adrift."

They obeyed him, wondering greatly, and in a very short time they had knotted together a rope of considerable length.

"Now, stand by to pay out." He knotted a bowline into the end of the rope, and slipped over the edge of the crevasse, the boys lowered gently. It was a perilous descent. The raw-hide rope chafed on the rough edge of the ice; any shock might sever the line; and that meant death for both. But Mr. Latimer descended deliberately, with the crashing sound of angry waters in his ears to lead him on. He heard a faint cry; looked down and made out a dark body hanging on a projecting shelf of ice. Baker was lying half-insensible on a natural shelf of ice, whereon he had fallen in his descent. But for that intervention he must have been lost.

Mr. Latimer gauged his distance carefully. Baker was lying some way to his right; without a moment's further hesitation Latimer commenced to swing himself sideways. It was risky work, but it succeeded. He yelled to the boys to be ready to slack away; when he was swung in towards the shelf he cried out again, and in some miraculous fashion he found himself sprawling beside the American.

"No, I don't think I'm crippled," said Baker breathlessly. "It was just the cold fear of it all. And I daren't move for fear I should roll off."

Mr. Latimer unhitched the rope about his

chest and secured it to the American. Then he shouted loudly, and Harold's face appeared over the edge of the crevasse. Not very far below the sea rippled hungrily.

"Hitch the dogs to the rope—as many as you can get," cried Mr. Latimer. "Then drive away as hard as you can."

It was done, and the only wonder was the rope did not break. But it was of rawhide and very strong; quickly Captain Baker vanished upwards, leaving his rescuer standing on the ledge. Presently the rope was sent down again, and Mr. Latimer was brought up in like fashion.

"There can't be any further question," said Baker gravely, when both stood once more on firm footing. "If I saved you, you saved me, so I reckon things are evened up considerably."

"We'll talk about that when we've negotiated this crevasse," said Mr. Latimer. They rested for a while to enable Baker to recover some of the strength that had been knocked out of his body; and before they camped for the night they had found a place where it was possible to get across the opening. But when they halted they were so worn out with their exertions that they had no energy left to build *igloos* or do anything save fling their tents up roughly, creep into their sleeping-bags and rest.

There was a sparkle in every eye next morning, however. All hands felt that this was the day for which the world had waited for centuries. In a few short hours they would set

foot on that mystic spot never hitherto seen by man. It was enough to inspire courage in the most faltering heart, and to these brave men, who had faced tremendous dangers without flinching, strength came in mighty waves.

"Let's get on," said Captain Baker impatiently, bolting food as he spoke. "I feel as if I couldn't wait a minute now. Gee! but this is worth living for."

Wonderful how the promise of success had stayed them! They all presented a very different appearance from that they had done two days before. Their eyes were bright; though their faces were blue and frozen they yet contrived to smile at one another. Victory was near, and such a victory!

They started in good order, with a clear sky and a biting wind from almost directly ahead. That wind was blowing over the Pole on its way towards them; and the thought of it inspired them still more. On they went on this last lap of a race that was to stir the entire world; on and on. They saw weird mirages as they went; at times, owing to some strange refraction of the sun's light, the surface over which they travelled appeared blood-red, at others it was a vivid purple. They were storming along through a place of infinite wonders; but they had hardly eyes for the many phenomena that surrounded them. It was nothing to them that the snow-plains danced and reeled beneath their eyes as if the whole expanse were moved from beneath;

nothing to them that mountain peaks arose in the sky and danced wildly to the sound of their rushing advance. Afterwards they would remember all this; it would come back to them as surely as if the impressions were actually photographed on their brains, but now—they had no eyes for anything save the northern horizon, beyond which lay the Pole.

They had shaken off that strange depression that comes to the bravest in Arctic solitudes. The sense of approaching victory was a finer tonic than any yet discovered by man; they strode forward manfully, like the heroes they were.

There were, however, difficulties still to be encountered. Gradually, as the hours fled by—they did not creep now, every hour seemed too short for all that had to be done in it—the wind increased again into a veritable gale. It seemed to blow from all quarters at once, baffling them, and the snow came with it. But they bent their heads and trudged forward nobly.

Harold was the first to fail. In eager haste to go on, he sprang to the summit of a large block of ice intending to plunge down the other side, but he slipped on the top and came down crashingly sideways. When he tried to gather himself together he found himself unable to move; he had sprained his ankle so badly that every twitch was an agony. They could not leave him there—after his splendid efforts it would have been sheer inhumanity to deny him.

the privilege of standing on the Pole. Mr. Latimer and Monro carried him carefully to the sledge and strapped him thereon, placing packages under the damaged leg to ease the strain. And though every jolt given was a cause of excruciating pain to the lad, he emitted no single complaint.

The cold was now so terrible that they could hardly think. But the going was still fairly smooth, and the spirit that had borne them up so long did not fail them. Over the ice crushed the sledges, the dogs putting their whole weight to the work ; onward, always onward.

At last Captain Baker stopped and threw up one mittened hand. The sledges came to a stop instantly.

"We shouldn't be far off now," said the American. "I calculate we are within sight of the thing, anyhow."

He took out his sextant, and Mr. Latimer followed his example.

"If only that snow would stop for a while," said both anxiously, and, as if in answer, there appeared a patch of bluish green in the sky ; the sun showed wanly. Up went the sextants again.

"Got it, Latimer."

"Got it, Baker."

They laid their sextants down on the snow and flapped their hands across their chests. No mistakes must be made now—everything depended on the carefulness of their observations. They drew out the grimy, greasy books that held the

records of their observations, transcribed from rough workings on snow, and began to figure the position out carefully. What did it matter to them if the temperature were eighty degrees below zero? As a matter of fact, the wind was veering a little, and the air was growing warmer. But they sat there on the snow, holding pencils in their hands, and never heeded the rigour of the day.

"I make it $89^{\circ} 59' 45''$," said Captain Baker, looking up from his book.

"I make it the same," said Mr. Latimer a moment later. "We're only a quarter of a mile from the Pole. A quarter of a mile!"

He looked about him as if in amazement at the success of his journey, and then cried the news to the lads. Monro at once sprang to the ice and commenced a wild fandango, and Harold, unable to shift from his position, clapped his hands enthusiastically. They had succeeded where others had failed!

"Come on, Latimer, I'll race you for it."

Captain Baker started forward at a run, heading straight towards the Pole. It was plain that in the marvellous excitement of the adventure he had forgotten everything save his desire to be first to reach the spot. And Mr. Latimer started after him. They had a bare quarter-mile to travel; and the Englishman was longer of limb than his rival. It seemed a foregone conclusion that Latimer must win, for he had everything in his favour. He covered the

distance with mighty strides; inch by inch he gained on the American. And then, almost within touching distance of the Pole, the Englishman remembered all he owed to his rival. He owed life, and not only his own life but those of the two boys also. And on the spur of the moment he slackened in his stride, stumbled, and fell face foremost into the hard snow. Captain Baker ran on swiftly, thinking that Latimer was at his elbow, and when he stopped he looked round with a cheer. He stood alone on the spot that was the North Pole, and Mr. Latimer stood a hundred yards away, smiling at him despite the agony of mind that he was enduring. For Latimer knew he had lost a fortune.

He strode forward, his hand held out. Close behind him came the sledge, tearing along at its top speed, Monro standing up and yelling wildly at the dogs, for the spirit of competition seemed to have entered into all. Close to the two men the lad drew up his dogs, jumped to the ice, and dragged out a flag from the sledge and threw it to his uncle; it was followed by another.

"I always said that I'd put Old Glory up here, even if the Jack went up first," said the American lad. And a moment later the two flags blew out on the breeze side by side, to show the world that England and America were still unbeaten, at the Pole as elsewhere.

Monro knelt beside his cousin. "I'll give

you a hand up, Harold," he said chokingly. "We'll stand on the Pole together." And whilst he cast loose the lashings that bound his chum to the sledge, Mr. Latimer saluted the American gravely.

"You are the first to reach the Pole, Captain Baker," he said. "I congratulate you most heartily. No one can ever take the honour away from you."

He held out his hand, and over the North Pole of the world Englishman and American shook hands heartily. Then the two lads hobbled forward and stood on that sacred spot, cheering their loudest. The impossible had been achieved—the North Pole was won!

CHAPTER XXII

HOMEWARD BOUND

It might be possible to say a great deal about the ensuing observations that were made at the Pole, but scientific facts are usually extremely dry. The fact of the matter is, about the first thing Captain Baker said after the two flags were securely planted was: "I feel uncommonly like having something to eat." So, before anything further was done, the successful party prepared a meal, eating it at exactly 90° N., seating themselves under the shadow of the flapping flags. It was a strange meal. Everywhere they looked was due south; there was no east, no west, no north. At this point all the meridians of longitude converged to a common focus; time, as time, had ceased to exist. At one side of the flagstaffs it was mid-day; at the other, midnight. Their watches told them that the actual time, according to Greenwich, was two o'clock in the afternoon; but they had nothing to prove the fact beyond their watches. Time was a thing unnecessary up there, for the only day was a year in length, six months of darkness, six months of daylight.

There was nothing to mark the spot as different from the leagues they had crossed.

It was simply a vast field of white and green and red, as the sun threw its colours vividly about them. A sheer wild waste ; without hills, volcanoes, open water, or anything out of the common. It might almost have been a snow-covered lake in Canada, or a meadow in England, save for the cold. But it was the North Pole ; and they had gained it.

"That was a mighty generous thing you did," said Baker, as they ate. "I forgot everything when I saw we were only quarter of a mile away, I forgot that I'd sworn we'd both reach the Pole together. But, of course, I shall tell everyone that we gained it side by side."

"No ; you won't," said Mr. Latimer gravely. "I intended that you should be first, and I think that I could wish for no greater honour than to be second to a great and noble man. For you might easily have left us all to perish where you found us. We were nothing to you."

"That doesn't make any difference," said Baker. "If you hadn't hauled me out of the crevasse you'd have had everything your own way."

But Mr. Latimer shook his head.

"I was second," he said. "The first *Englishman* to reach the Pole, yes, but not the first *man*. And I congratulate you most heartily again." And no protestations on the part of Captain Baker would move him from the attitude he had taken up. It was his idea of paying a debt.

After the meal was over considerable time was spent in taking additional observations, to verify their position. The two flags were flying actually in the centre of the world's axis; and as the wind was still strong, and the bunting flapping wildly, the two emblems were taken down, and painted iron ones substituted. After that a hole was dug beneath them, and two cylinders were carefully buried, though there was only a small chance of their ever being found again on that spot, for it appeared as if the ice were slowly moving from east to west. However, it was all they could do to prove that they had been there; and when they had done everything that could be done, they took one last look about them, gravely saluted the two rigid flags, and turned their backs on the place they had risked everything to gain. That same day—it was April 20—they reached the spot where they had left their caches, and there they camped for the night.

The knowledge of success seemed to key them up to a marvellous pitch, and weariness appeared unknown. For many hours after the *igloos* were built they sat and talked over the wonders they had done; examining each other's observations, correcting, countersigning everything; adding proof to proof, to satisfy those at home who would surely deny the truth of their stories.

The retreat was conducted swiftly. They forgot the awful perils through which they had

passed; they thought only of the welcome that would await them when once more they saw their kind. And it spurred them on to such endeavours as even eclipsed those of their forward dash. There was much to discuss with their companion Baker; little by little they heard all there was to hear about his marvellous journey from Smith Sound in Greenland, about the new land he had discovered in the higher latitudes, about the tremendous cold that he experienced off Heiberg Island, the truth of which cold they were well able to substantiate. But the journey back was much like the journey ahead; and there is no need to tire the patient reader with manifold details that would be but a repetition of what has already been told.

Harold suffered considerably from his ankle, until Captain Baker compounded a cunning liniment of brandy and grease with which the affected part was diligently anointed. Little by little it became possible for the lad to set foot to ground; and by the time they came to the parting point he was almost able to hold his own. Of course, they suffered endless privations; they had a startling insufficiency of food; but they contrived somehow to endure. Captain Baker gave them generously of his stores, running himself and his Eskimos short for the purpose; and during that retreat from the Polar solitudes a lasting friendship grew up between the four white men. They were drawn together by the dangers they had mutually

encountered ; and that is the real friendship, that which is born of perils overpassed in common.

There were days when it was impossible to move a step ; when the Arctic blizzards held full sway over the world ; and then they could do nothing save crouch in their *igloo* and pray for better conditions. They grew accustomed to starvation at such times ; it was impossible to find food, and they hesitated to kill their dogs, although even that became necessary after a while. Dog-meat is not pleasant, but it kept life in their bodies ; and Baker very generously sacrificed his own animals, knowing that the party from the *Enterprise* had only the poor remnants of their pack to rely on. It was wonderful how Loot-chik-na endured the privations ; no matter though the other dogs turned vicious and surly, he was always loyal to his master ; and the explorers came to the conclusion that the ultimate success of their expedition was due in great measure to the marvellous endurance of the big husky.

But all things must have an end, either in success or failure, in life or death. There came a time when the paths of the two parties diverged. Mr. Latimer entreated Captain Baker to accompany him to the *Enterprise*, offering him the hospitality of that ship for as long as he cared to accept it ; but the American had made his plans. He had seen nothing of the great stretch of open water which the others had crossed so daringly, and so they kept in his

company until they found themselves south of the danger ; after which the parting came.

It was nothing spectacular. Baker simply shook hands round, after piling a generous proportion of his stores on the English sledge, and : "Good-bye, Latimer. You ought to have been first at the Pole !" he said.

"Good-bye, Baker. You were first, and no one can take the honour from you."

"Good-bye, Loys. You're the sort of men I'd like to have with me when I go exploring again."

"Good-bye, sir. We'd like to go with you when you do start." Then, another hearty grip of the hand, a sudden huskiness of the voice, and—that was all. They turned after they had gone southward and east a mile, and saw the little party travelling stolidly on into the unknown.

There is no room to tell of the last mad struggle the party made to reach the spot where they had parted with the Eskimos. Suffice it to say that they reached it in a worn-out condition, to find the Eskimos still there, for though their fears had kept them from following further north, they had also kept them from flying the spot. Nagathchook had also found his way to the camp, and was the first to welcome them. There the three explorers found fresh supplies of food, and ate to repletion. There also the surviving dogs were enabled to distend their bodies with copious supplies of reindeer meat, after which two days were allowed for recovery ; and then the course was once more set for the south.

At long last there came a day when Mr. Latimer took observations, and reported that another ten miles would bring them to the *Enterprise*. They took fresh heart and struggled forward, for they had been delayed by more gales and blizzards, and their food supplies were once more running short. They had failed to find one of the caches on which they had relied; either the ice had shifted, taking the cache with it, or else bears had been about. The latter supposition was unlikely, for they had not seen a living thing beyond their own party ever since leaving Captain Baker.

They pressed forward gallantly, steering a steadfast course by compass for the *Enterprise*, and after going for several hours, growing weaker and weaker all the time, they halted in despair.

There was no sign of the ship to be seen! What had happened?

"She can't have been nipped in the ice and so sunk," said Mr. Latimer. "Captain Labby would never have allowed that. Even if she had, there would be some sort of a hut erected. No; the only thing I can think of is that the ice-currents must have carried her in a direction I wasn't counting on. I allowed for a certain amount of drift."

They looked at one another hopelessly. Their last mouthful of provisions had been eaten; the dogs were starving, and those dogs were absolutely necessary to their further progress. Whilst they stared in hopeless wonder, one of the Eskimos

gave a shout ; and following his pointing finger they saw a great moose standing on a hummock two hundred yards away. It was the first living thing they had seen for ages ; and now the only desire was to make it a dead thing as speedily as possible. Monro crept soundlessly to the sledge and took up his rifle. He seemed to aim for an unconscionable time ; and when he fired they said that he had missed, for the moose disappeared from view as completely as if the ice had opened and swallowed it up. But Lootchik-na, released from his traces, swept forward, and in a minute or two more they heard his yelp, denoting that he had found what he sought ; and when they followed they came upon the body of the great deer shot clean through the heart.

"Too much depended on that shot to miss," said Monro, as they congratulated him on his success. "Let's get eating."

It was a proof of the straits to which they were reduced that the first meal taken from the moose was eaten raw. They ate ravenously, and their strength came back ; they piled what was left of their quarry on the sledge, and once more set out bravely, inspired to further effort by the thought that where one moose had been found others might also be discovered.

On May 20th Harold gave a croaking cry : "The *Enterprise* !" he said feebly, and they saw that his words were true. They were at their last gasp ; overcome by emotion, they sank

down on the summit of the hummock they had climbed, and lay in helpless weakness there. Mr. Latimer made a last despairing effort, loaded his rifle, and fired both barrels into the air. Within an hour a relief party had set off from the ship, and reached the sides of the exhausted travellers; and there are not words enough in the English language to tell of the reception that awaited them aboard.

They had tried and had won; they had ventured and had conquered. There seemed nothing else to do. But as they laid Mr. Latimer down on a settee in the *Enterprise's* saloon, he gave a low groan of utter despair.

"Yes, we've reached the Pole," he said to Dr. Vyncr. "But we weren't the first there. And ruin is nearer than ever."

The bitterness of death settled upon him; look where he would, he could see no hope.

CHAPTER XXIII

ENGLAND ONCE MORE AND A LAST SURPRISE

A GREAT silence seemed to reign aboard the *Enterprise*, for it was said that those gallant men who had dared so much lay near to death. They were feeling the stupendous strain to which they had been subjected now that the strain was removed. Dr. Vyner had his hands full; he hardly knew what rest was. He attended his three friends as diligently as if they were of his own blood and every hour of every day anxious enquirers gathered about the door of the cabin, asking for news.

"I think I know what they want," said Captain Labby, and gave the word for the fires to be started and steam to be raised. "Once they get a sniff of the open sea they'll come round like fighting cocks."

The ice was commencing to soften under the summer sun; already there were great rifts appearing on the horizon. Slowly, very slowly indeed, the ship began to move; the full drive of her engines hardly stirred her at first, but gradually she seemed to know what was expected of her, and she rose triumphantly to the task. The heavy bow plunged down on the ice, crashed through, and sent the broken masses flying in

every direction ; the ship gathered way upon her, the ice gave before that steadfast advance ; the first patch of open water was gained, and after that there was nothing to do save drive forward at the best pace they could muster. Not that the dangers were over yet. The supply of fuel was fast becoming exhausted, and long before they had reached the southern limits of the ice-fields the prognostications of the shipowner were fulfilled, for the wooden masts of the *Enterprise* were cut down and crammed into the fires to keep steam up in the boilers, and the wooden sheathing of the ship was ripped away in huge lumps for the same purpose.

The false bow followed ; it would have been difficult to fix it in its place in any event ; and now that the masts were gone there was no need for the *Enterprise* to be made available for sailing. So that it was a bare and ungainly-looking craft that ultimately forced its way through the last of the pack, and entered the open waters of the Arctic Ocean.

Harold Latimer was the first of the three to recover from his exertions ; Monro followed him. They had had a terrible time, and they would bear the scars of that journey all their lives ; they were no longer gay and laughing lads—they had gained the stamp of tried and proven manhood. In places their hair was quite grey ; they had ugly sores on their limbs, and only the air of England would restore them to full health. But by comparison, with what they

had passed through they were strong and well when the ship burst through the barrier ice at last. They had lain unconscious, raving in a high fever, for many weeks, and they had known nothing of what was going forward. Judge, therefore, of their surprise when they were allowed on deck for the first time, to find the ship practically clear. There was floe ice in abundance everywhere, but there were open channels too; and through these the *Enterprise* was picking her way purposefully.

They passed the easternmost end of Hazen Land on a certain day in August, going slowly now, for their last fuel was almost done. Captain Labby had long ago burnt the wooden shed that had housed the submarine, and he looked grave. The boats would be the next to go; after them the wooden decks and the inner fittings of the ship; once those were burnt there was nothing to do save trust to currents and chance to bear them to Franz Josef Fiord, where, it was to be hoped, the steamer with coal would be waiting.

Mr. Latimer appeared on deck for the first time on the day Hazen Land was sighted. The explorer's face had grown very old; his hair was quite white, and his broad shoulders were bowed heavily. He was still very weak, and in his eyes was no light. The expenses of this expedition must in honour bound be paid somehow, and he saw no way of meeting the debt. For himself he cared nothing; but he thought

of his wife and son, and his heart was filled with despair. It was all in vain that he tried to throw off the growing depression that held him in thrall. He saw only ruin wherever he looked, and Vyner grew impatient at the continued moroseness.

"One would think you'd just discovered a graveyard instead of the Pole, Latimer," he protested, and the explorer sighed wearily.

"There is something I think you ought to know," said the surgeon after a while. They were all on the poop, lightly clad, for now the open water was reached the temperature, which in England would have been unbearably cold, was so changed as to seem like great warmth to those who had starved up about the Pole.

"What is that?" asked Mr. Latimer.

"About the second mate." The two boys started. They had never thought of Slazenby for weeks. "It seems the man was bad right through," said Dr. Vyner. "Slazenby is dead, by the way, did you know? He died unpleasantly—yes, it was hydrophobia, as I expected. A bite from a husky is enough to give any man that. He never spoke before he died, but—well, in hydrophobia there is often one spell of calm just before the end; and when this spell came on Slazenby made signs for paper. I gave it him, and he managed to write down a full confession of his share in the matter. It seems he was the man who cut the topsail sheet, as he was the man who placed the piece of metal in

the *Pioneer's* engines, which nearly cost we four our lives. And it was also he who poisoned the dogs, as we knew. Well, in his confession he said that he had been paid to stop this expedition at all costs. He named the sum as a thousand pounds, and—listen to this, Latimer—the man who was to pay the money was Sir Spencer Fitzgerald."

"Fitzgerald!" exclaimed the explorer. "The man who wanted the *Enterprise*! I didn't think he would stoop to such meannesses. Ay, and so that was why Slazenby was so determined to stop us? Well, he has had his reward, and we, who suffered most from his evil work, cannot wish him a worse fate than that which has been his."

At this moment Captain Labby came aft from the bridge and said that signals of distress were flying on the land abeam. "We've not got an ounce of steam to spare," he remarked warningly. "It will take us all our time to get to Franz Josef Fiord."

"If it is a signal of distress it must be answered," said Mr. Latimer firmly. "We should be scoundrels to abandon any suffering men to their fate."

So the *Enterprise* made through the floe ice to the land, and there they found another wonder awaiting them. The remains of a camp were there; and over them flew a tattered flag. In a large low hut were the bodies of several men; and there were indications to show that they

had comprised a party under the leadership of Sir Spencer Fitzgerald. From certain evidence one body proved to be that of the baronet himself—but he must have been dead for months. There was nothing to tell how the party had got there; there they were. It was evident that the leader had kept a diary, for under his dead hand they found a book; but the damp had crept in and obliterated whatever writing there might have been. There was not a scrap of food in the entire camp—the men had perished miserably of starvation. There was no ship, nothing. And no ship was ever heard of again, though on arriving in England the men of the *Enterprise* heard that Sir Spencer had set sail from Peterhead in a whaling barque shortly after the *Enterprise* left. Whether the crew mutinied and put him ashore, afterwards being crushed in the ice and so destroyed, or whether the entire crew had abandoned their ship in haste, and so been slowly starved to death, no man will ever know. It was only another mystery of the Arctic, that home of mysteries.

The *Enterprise* reached Franz Josef Fiord stripped to her bare skin. As a matter of fact she actually drifted the last few miles of the way; and only by dint of the most cunning navigation was she brought in sight of the opening. But once that was gained the worst was over. The steamer was waiting with coal; she weighed anchor and put out at once, hove her tow-rope aboard, and so the *Enterprise* was dragged

ignominiously to an anchor, and to all intents and purposes her voyage was over.

Full of coal once more, with a fresh supply of provisions aboard, the Polar Expedition ship turned her bow towards England, and reached Liverpool early in September after a risky voyage, for the lack of a proper bow made the vessel almost unmanageable. Once the genial breezes of the south began to caress the onward speeding ship, those who had fared to the Pole picked up strength rapidly. Even Mr. Latimer lost a certain amount of his moroseness, and brightened up wonderfully. His was too strong a nature to remain long downcast.

"We'll find a way out of the mess yet, boys," he said cheerfully to his young companions. "I'll write a book about it all, and I'll go all over the country lecturing. There'll be a lot of money to be made, now that we have actually reached the Pole. Heavens! I sound like a money-grubber of the first water; but I'm not. It's only that debt that is worrying me. You see, the quarter million belongs by right to Baker, and he will be sure to claim it—for he was the first to reach the Pole. But we won't despair—and now that we're getting well again—oh, be sure we'll find some way out of the trouble."

Monro was making mental resolves to write to his wealthy father as soon as the ship reached home, entreating him to "stump up" as he called it, and so put his much-loved uncle out of misery.

But there was really no need. For one of the first men to reach the *Enterprise* when she anchored in the Mersey was Mr. Menzies. He strode along to where Mr. Latimer was standing, with one arm thrown about his wife's waist, and lifted his hat.

"I congratulate you, my dear sir," he said. "Once you have shown us the actual proofs that you have reached the Pole we shall be glad to hand over to you the quarter-million left for the purpose by our client."

Mr. Latimer gaped widely, turned white, seemed about to fall. In a rush it all came back to him, the misery that the clasp of his wife's arms round his neck had set at bay.

"I wasn't the first to reach the Pole," he said weakly. "My message from Reykjavik told the world that I was second."

"Yes, but the legacy was left to the first *Englishman* who gained the North Pole," said Mr. Menzies precisely. "I believe the fact was omitted from the first announcement in the papers; and I daresay you were too busy to notice the omission. But the money is honestly yours. The real state of the case was publicly declared after your ship left port, as some people wrote concerning it. It was then too late to communicate with you—and anyhow we considered it was not necessary."

All the members of the expedition foregathered on a certain day at Royal Latimer not many

months later. Dr. Vyner was there, in no more danger of a nervous breakdown; Captain Labby was there, inclined to keep a watchful eye on Chips, who was holding forth to Harold about the dead second mate; Mr. Macpherson was there; everyone who had had the least to do with the venture was there, and be sure Loot-chik-na, the great husky, was very much in evidence. And it was Dr. Vyner who had the last word, as usual.

"All the same," he said, when the first rejoicings were over, when the simple sailormen had admired to the full the wonders of the lovely old house, when they had clapped Loot-chik-na, now tamed to docility, on his shaggy sides,—“all the same, I think you might have brought me a piece of the Pole back, Harold.”

And then, when night drew down, and the lamps were burning brightly, a band came up from the village, and struck up a merry reel.

“Come along, Chips!” said Captain Labby in his usual harsh voice. “Show the ladies how you can step it out.”

And Chips did as he was bid, thumbs cracking, heels flying; even as he had done in the icebound wastes that hem in the boreal Pole.

Some day, says Monro, he will accompany his cousin and uncle on another dash; to the South Pole this time.

THE END.

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